This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

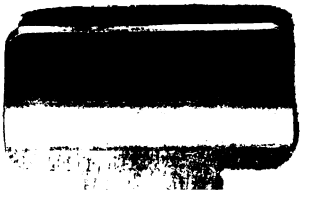
**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

# WORKMANSHIP IN WORDS

Digitized by Google

897a
K29
W



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# WORKMANSHIP IN WORDS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# WORKMANSHIP IN WORDS

BY

JAMES P. KELLEY

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1917

Digitized by Google

*Copyright, 1916,*
BY LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

*All rights reserved*

Digitized by Google

## PREFATORY

If any reader should find his own name in these pages, I ask him to believe that my criticisms, whether just or not, are honest, friendly, and well meant; and I do not take refuge, as a reviewer may, behind the screen of anonymity.

I suppose the English language, with all its faults, is on the whole the best that man ever spoke. Let us do all we can to keep it good.

J. P. K.

357357

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I | Preliminary | 3 |
| II | Concerning Form | 8 |
| III | What the Play Treats On | 14 |
| IV | Truth | 17 |


## GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| V | Dry as Dust | 23 |
| VI | Concord | 28 |
| VII | My Abridgments | 35 |
| VIII | Comparisons are Odorous | 43 |
| IX | Comparison and Coördination | 49 |
| X | Correspondents | 55 |
| XI | The Pronoun | 68 |
| XII | Some Matters of Syntax | 83 |
| XIII | Misused Particles | 96 |
| XIV | Misused Words in General | 104 |
| XV | Shall and Will | 119 |
| XVI | Punctuation | 131 |


Digitized by Google

## CLEARNESS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| XVII | INTRODUCTORY | 141 |
| XVIII | PUNCTUATION AND CLEARNESS | 145 |
| XIX | FORMAL CLEARNESS (I) | 151 |
| XX | FORMAL CLEARNESS (II): *ONLY* | 162 |
| XXI | THE SQUINTING CONSTRUCTION | 168 |
| XXII | THE AUTOMATIC SENTENCE | 174 |
| XXIII | THE CRAZY SENTENCE | 182 |
| XXIV | MORE INSANITY | 189 |
| XXV | IT | 199 |
| XXVI | OTHER PRONOUNS | 208 |
| XXVII | UNCLASSIFIED CONFUSIONS | 215 |


## EASE


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| XXVIII | PRELIMINARY | 231 |
| XXIX | TWO FORMS OF CLUMSINESS | 236 |
| XXX | PUNCTUATION AND EASE | 241 |
| XXXI | EUPHONY | 248 |
| XXXII | THE AWKWARD SQUAD (I) | 256 |
| XXXIII | THE AWKWARD SQUAD (II) | 263 |
| XXXIV | FORMALITY AND GOOD FORM | 272 |


## FORCE


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| XXXV | GOOD THEORY | 283 |
| XXXVI | BAD PRACTICE | 288 |
| XXXVII | LINE UPON LINE, PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT | 295 |
| XXXVIII | HERE A LITTLE AND THERE A LITTLE | 304 |
| XXXIX | THE LARGER UNIT | 314 |
| | INDEX OF PROPER NAMES | 323 |
| | GENERAL INDEX | 329 |


Digitized by Google

I recognize but one mental acquisition as an essential part of the education of a lady or a gentleman, — namely, an accurate and refined use of the mother tongue.

— Charles W. Eliot.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

# WORKMANSHIP IN WORDS

## I

### PRELIMINARY

"An appalling increase every day in slipshod writing that would not have been tolerated for one moment a hundred years ago." These words are Mr. Thomas Hardy's. It is good to know that "the greatest master of English fiction" — I quote from Mr. Henry M. Alden — believes in Workmanship.

We are not concerned here with the standards of a hundred years ago, nor do we inquire whether or not the use of bad English is increasing. Certain it is that the English of our time is very far from what it should be; and it is so faulty because we have not been taking pains to make it good.

True, we have from John Henry Newman the following judgment:



Digitized by Google

This is not a day for great writers, but for good writing, and a great deal of it. There never was a time when men wrote so much and so well, and that, without being of any great account themselves. While our literature in this day, especially the periodical, is rich and various, its language is elaborated to a perfection far beyond that of our Classics, by the jealous rivalry, and incessant practice, and the mutual influence, of its many writers.

I do not say that Newman was mistaken, or that his words would not apply now; but it is safe to affirm that great improvement is possible and that its price is plain hard work. Furthermore, a style may be of classic excellence in the higher qualities of good writing and yet leave much to be desired in respect to what I may call the minor moralities. One who deals largely with these minor moralities need make no apology. Mr. Alden's "that which determines the technique of literary art, while it is indispensable, is negative" will hold good if we read, while it is negative, is indispensable.

If Buffon did not exactly say "*Le style, c'est l'homme*", he has been, like Falstaff, "the cause that wit is in other men"; and so we are indebted to him for a familiar saying, French in its neatness and point, and proverbial in its condensed wisdom. Style not only reveals the man;

Digitized by Google

surely reacting, it makes the man. Style reveals the reader by selecting him; and surely acting, it makes the reader also. We are changed into the image of what we read and of what we write, of what we say and of what we hear.

At this point be it said that the whole discourse of this book bears no less upon private communication than upon what is addressed to the public; and upon the spoken word as well as the written or printed page. And workmanship in words has to do with style in the most inclusive sense of the term; so that nothing pertaining to the expression of thought in words is foreign to our purpose.

"Words, words, words!" It is Hamlet moody and distracted that answers thus wearily the question of Polonius. "That noble and most sovereign reason" is "out of tune." We all sympathize with the gloomy prince, for we have all been bored; but to despise words is to despise what has made civilization possible, and what conditions human progress. Words have raised us above the beasts that perish. Without them we could neither do the business of life, nor attain its felicities; in the larger sense hope would not exist, nor aspiration, nor imagination. Newman says of the Greek λόγος:

Digitized by Google

It stands both for reason and for speech; and it is difficult to say which it means more properly. It means both at once: why? because really they cannot be divided — because they are in a true sense one. When we can separate light and illumination, life and motion, the convex and the concave of a curve, then will it be possible for thought to tread speech under foot, and to hope to do without it.

And Robert Louis Stevenson writes: "In short, the first duty of a man is to speak; that is his chief business in this world."

Words fitly spoken are verily like apples of gold in pictures of silver — both precious and beautiful. Literature is the greatest of all arts. It is democratic like music — universal in its appeal. He that will may not only enjoy it and profit by it; in some rudimentary way, at least, he may practise it. If we live in the world, we must use words; if we choose, we may use them well; there is no limit for the humblest mortal, save in his own capacity. He that does anything for the right use of words does so much, directly or indirectly, for character, for conduct, for happiness.

Walter Pater says:

Still scholars, I suppose, and not only scholars, but all disinterested lovers of books, will always look to it

Digitized by Google

[literature] as to all other fine art, for a refuge, a sort of cloistral refuge, from a certain vulgarity in the actual world.

This is true enough, so far as it goes; but as the noblest architecture or sculpture is ennobled by the freest and broadest public uses, so it is the chief glory of literature that it comes home "to men's business and bosoms," shedding light everywhere like the sun in heaven, into brawling street as well as cloistral study.

Language is a magnificent instrument, of which we all must needs make use. Govern the ventages and give it breath, "and it will discourse most excellent music." No one knows all its stops; no one has mastered its harmonies, its wonderful compass, its infinite modulations. It is too great an organ for the greatest of mortals — yet the humblest of the pure in heart may draw from it wonderful melody.

Let me add that the pursuit of fitness and force in the use of words is no irksome drudgery. Whoever studies the things of the external world is sure to enjoy his work. Words are natural objects, real as rocks or lilies; they are endlessly interesting and delightful. The wealth and wonder of them is the heritage of all mankind.

Digitized by Google

## II

### CONCERNING FORM

THE literature of our times is journalistic. To a writer who had ambition without craftsmanship a publisher said, "We care far more for substance than for form." So far forth, he was at one with the news editor who wants a fetching "story", and cares not to have it told in the language of a gentleman. These worthies do indeed care for form, as advertisers and demagogues care, but not too much for style — for good breeding working out in mannerly words. Goldsmith says that "A book may be amusing with numerous errors, or it may be dull without a single absurdity." But if we are bright, we need not be slovenly; if we must be dull, let us be dull with a decent regard for the intelligent opinion of mankind.

Doubtless it is true that some of our best English is written for the great dailies; but this



Digitized by Google

is only a little — it is in bad company. The fifteen-cent magazines have lately abounded in a kind of work the monotonous cleverness of which becomes a wearisome mannerism, and may be even more harmful than the frankly stupid style. All this is bad enough; but it is easy to find some excuse. The worst of the situation is that the English language is abused constantly in periodicals of higher class, and in the better sort of books — and for this abuse no good reason can be discovered.

Time was when the printed page was taken seriously. An author was a personage; a book, as such, appealed to the imagination. It was possible for a library to be a consecrated place, and for the infrequent magazine to give a bookish child a quickening experience long to be remembered — an experience which was the stuff of which poetry is made. Books are manufactured now; they are ground out in the mill; they are made to sell, and dumped upon the market. If a novel brings in the big royalties, who cares whether or not it is written in English! Even persons of real distinction and scholars of high attainment write as if they were Shaksperes and need not trouble themselves about detail —

Digitized by Google

as if their wise or witty thoughts would automatically get to themselves fine and fitting expression. But the writers of our day are not geniuses, and this is not the age of Elizabeth. Vastly superior in some respects, in others vastly inferior, the twentieth century is so *different* from the seventeenth that it must needs have a different literary method. Then, imagination was so free and so prodigiously active that it *made* art; art now, by fidelity to the timeless principles of form, must control the imagination and chasten the style. And to the technique of form belongs conscientious finish.

> In the elder days of Art,
> Builders wrought with greatest care
> Each minute and unseen part;
> For the Gods see everywhere.

Men, too, see everywhere. They see more than they consciously observe. They miss they know not what.

One meets with curious pronouncements. In Mr. F. T. Cooper's volume on "The Craftsmanship of Writing" I read that style is "a matter of cadence and sound sequence." But elsewhere the author says: "Or suppose again that his fault is one of style. You may point out that

Digitized by Google

his . . . language is pompous, or high-colored, or vulgar." This calls for a new definition of style. "Hence it would seem", Newman says, "that attention to the language, for its own sake, evidences not the true poet, but the mere artist." And he speaks of a time "before the theatre had degraded poetry into an exhibition, and criticism narrowed it into an art." One wonders if Newman makes a distinction between the higher qualities of a sculptor or an architect (which I take it are identical with the higher qualities of a poet) and his artistic qualities!

Art is a great word, and "mere artist" is "a vile phrase." The poet at his supreme achievement is then most the artist, and the artist in words at his humblest task need not cease to be a poet. Style belongs to both "art" and literature, because both are art; and style in speech or writing, so far from being a mere trick of melody, covers every kind and every detail of form. Mere artist! The Deity whom Newman served as truly with his surpassing literary art as in his priestly function is the Master of all artists. His art is poetry, and his poetry is art. The Style in which the heavens declare his glory, in which the untoiling lilies are arrayed,

Digitized by Google

in which ancient psalmist and Galilean Messiah spake, is more than "cadence and sound sequence."

I shall deal with every matter of form in discourse as having to do with style; and style, in the broadest sense, I shall regard as an inevitable and inseparable character of all speech and writing; an integral and essential part of all literature.

It is of little use to find fault with authors as a class. Many individuals of the craft shall in these pages exhibit their own quality. My notes abound in quoted passages so bad that they need not be discussed; some debatable cases will be briefly studied.

I have lately read with profit, amusement, and mild exasperation a book on "The Standard of Usage in English", from which I shall have occasion to quote. The eminent author seems to have been "exceedingly mad" against the grammarians, purists, and other "lewd fellows of the baser sort" who presume to have opinions about the English language without adequate scholarship, and without due reverence for the "usage" of their betters. If I bring myself under the same condemnation with these, it may be in part be-

Digitized by Google

cause I subscribe too heartily to Professor Lounsbury's[1] own comfortable statement:

> In itself it is right that men should hold and express opinions about the propriety of usages already existing or coming in, and do all that in them lies to bring about the rejection of what they deem undesirable.

[1] All that I have said of Professor Lounsbury, here and elsewhere in these pages, was in manuscript while he was still living and active. I have not thought it necessary to make any material change.

Digitized by Google

## III

### WHAT THE PLAY TREATS ON

THE first requisite of good discourse is Truth. Later, we shall very briefly consider this requisite. In respect of form, which most concerns us here, Grammatical Propriety is fundamental. Under this head we may take up some matters which would by a rigid analysis be excluded. On the other hand certain topics pertaining to grammar have important relations to other subjects presently to be named; and the same illustrative passage may be quoted more than once. Conversation is often instructive and stimulating without being hampered by elaborate system, which would be the ruin of conversation. It suits my views to claim for these little studies some measure of the same freedom that belongs to informal talk. After Grammatical Propriety, and in what I suppose to be the order of their importance, though not necessarily in the order



Digitized by Google

of their treatment, may be mentioned Clearness, Force, and Ease. The subject of Unity will not be considered except incidentally in this book, which neither claims nor attempts to be exhaustive.

I have taken some pains to be accurate in quotation, and to avoid doing injustice. It should be remembered, however, that passages are used because of their relation to the special topic under consideration, rather than to show the general merits or defects of the author quoted; and that my limits forbid long extracts where short ones will serve. In making a very large number of quotations, some minor errors, greatly to be regretted, are practically unavoidable. In many cases material has been rejected because I was not quite sure of the author's meaning; and probably I have sometimes misunderstood the passages I have used. If I have anywhere been careless, I am likely to be the chief sufferer — at least, I hope I shall be. Finally, I cannot expect, however painstaking, to avoid entirely in my own work the faults I find in that of others, or faults to which I am blind.

Professor Lounsbury quotes the following passage from De Quincey's Essay on Style:

Digitized by Google

Pedantry, though it were unconscious pedantry, once steadily diffused through a nation as to the very moulds of its thinking and the general tendencies of its expression, could not but stiffen the natural graces of composition and weave fetters about the free movements of human thought.

True enough; but it has been well said that he is freest who is most obedient to law. If any man is "effectually called" to the work of writing, and is properly enlightened, he will be quite cheerfully subject to the laws of thought and the principles of expression.

Digitized by Google

## IV

### TRUTH

In a book on Workmanship, why write about Truth? The index of Professor A. S. Hill's excellent treatise on "The Principles of Rhetoric" makes no mention of the topic of Truth; under Sincerity, the reader is referred to a single short paragraph. There is some reason, then, for the question I have just asked.

Surely whatever doctrine of truth applies to any workman's trade applies to the trade of writing; and if there are any fine arts in which this doctrine may not with impunity be disregarded, one of these is the fine art of discourse. "False fronts" are not more unworkmanlike and inartistic in personal adornment or in architecture than are shams and frauds and "fakes" and all manner of lies in public or private utterance. And the habit, however formed, of not matching the real fact by the true word, or of treating ethical



Digitized by Google

truth as if it were in no way sacred, is as sure to bring retribution to the writer as it is to do harm through the printed page. No one, I suppose, would say of "Mark Twain" that he was insincere; it is not without significance, however, if when he tried to tell his chosen biographer the story of his life he couldn't tell it true.

If the training of the mendacious reporter made him an artist in words, the price would be far too high for the "goods"; but if anything fair and fine comes out of bad journalism it comes in spite of the badness. Corruption and decay may fertilize corn or roses; moral disintegration and spiritual deadness are not the conditions for a literary product that shall be wholesome, useful, or permanently delightful.

As to the fact of untruth, there is no need of calling attention to the irresponsible "claims" and reckless statements of the partisan press. Upon the evil of it all, this is no place to wax eloquent. Ordinary partisan misrepresentation probably is less harmful than the satanic cynicism of the brilliant journalist. In periodicals so ably conducted that the best writers and most scholarly readers simply cannot keep away from them, the "cocksureness" of caustic editorial

Digitized by Google

writing is undoubtedly effective; but it makes neither for good art nor for good morals.

My excellent rural neighbor who regularly introduced his statements by the formula "I b'lieve" was over-scrupulous. Some freedom, especially in expressing positive opinions, may be conceded to the writer. But it is not well to affirm that "every schoolboy knows" what in point of fact the average schoolboy does not know; or to say that "when we" — Lowell and Hale — "were boys, no New Englander was capable of confounding" *shall* and *will;* or to make the sweeping statement that "Nine out of every ten tuberculous patients cannot by any possibility secure a breath of fresh air, a ray of sunlight, a mouthful of nourishing food, or an hour's rest." Born closer to the soil, I have thought that I knew the old New England rural dialect even better than Lowell knew it. That the farmer was in general a pretty safe guide on *shall* and *will*, I fully believe; but I should not dare to say that he never went wrong. The conditions of the New-York East Side, unexaggerated, are bad enough. The heat of extemporaneous preaching might excuse, if not justify, the sentence I have quoted about the tuberculous;

Digitized by Google

in cold print, it would be more convincing if it were credible. Convincing or not, what we say should be true. In the long run, an author's style will effect more for good, and of course will be better merely as style, if carefully pruned.

To tell the truth is a hard task, as any one knows who, with adequate intelligence, has tried it. The strenuous spiritual life reacts for good upon him who lives it. The ideal of good writing is the rational, clear, forcible, winning utterance of truth, weighted and yet given wings by the personality of the writer.

Digitized by Google

# GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

## V

### DRY AS DUST

HAVING given this chapter a deterrent heading, I cannot be held responsible if the reader disregards my warning and comes to grief. "Within the memory of men now living", Grammar used to be taught, after a fashion, in the common schools. I dare say the study is not remembered with enthusiasm; yet much study of the grammar of several languages has not been to me a weariness of the flesh. The subject interested me and seemed important. But now comes Professor Lounsbury, giving me to understand that there are no principles of "universal grammar", and thus apparently bringing grammar down from its supposed scientific dignity to a mere account of "Usage." And along with my delusions about the Science of Grammar, and kindly memories of Goodwin, Gildersleeve, and Lane, I must give up, alas! my cherished notions of democracy



Digitized by Google

in the things of the mind; for "Usage", forsooth, is the usage of the elect.

Well, I will pick myself up, gathering my scattered and shattered wits as well as I can. Leaving high themes of science to the logicians and psychologists and students of Comparative Grammar (if there be any left of these last), I will take heart to believe that at least in the English language there are certain facts of Usage — I use the capital U for a while in deference to our eminent teacher — which may be and indeed have been so far generalized upon as to establish what it is convenient to call principles; principles to which the Great Masters have adhered in the main; principles to which it becomes us of the common herd — all but one in every ten thousand of those who speak or write for the public — to do our humble best to conform.

Language being used to convey thoughts from one mind to another, it is an advantage to have certain conventions of uniformity in the use of language — as, for instance, the convention of concords — so that if A speaks to B there will be the more chance of B's getting some true notion of what A is trying to say. Or suppose that B could always, by exercise of sufficient

Digitized by Google

diligence, puzzle out A's meaning; still the economy of business, and its courtesy, would require that A should speak or write as if B's time were of some value. Moreover it is "more fun" to live and have intercourse with the world if the world does not make intercourse too difficult.

Let us look at the subject quite seriously. Professor Lounsbury says:

> What are these principles of universal grammar, it is natural to ask. They can hardly be anything else than rules based upon practices which all languages agree in observing.

And he goes on to show that languages do not all agree, etc. The phrase "principles of universal grammar" is not mine. It may be better to speak of general principles, deducible from the laws of thought, which apply ideally to all conveyance of thought by means of words; so that if any language is too rude or undeveloped to conform to these principles, it falls short of the best uses. These principles, grounded in reason, are in line with expediency. And they furnish a standard, observe, by which we distinguish between that which is rational and regular in language, and that which is called idiom.

Digitized by Google

Professor Lounsbury has an interesting passage on his *bête noire,* the purist:

> He may protest against the employment by famous authors of certain words or constructions. He may declare these opposed to reason, contrary to the analogies of the language, or tending to destroy distinctions which should be maintained. If they heed his remonstrances, well and good. If they disregard them, he mistakes his position when he pretends to sit in judgment upon the decisions of his masters.

Whatever is, in the way of undoubtedly established English usage, must be admitted to be English. It does not follow that whatever is English is right. Neither in respect to language, nor in respect to anything else, does the man who has taken the trouble to work his way to convictions "mistake his position" when he sits in judgment on the "decisions" of those who have worked their way — if indeed they have — to different convictions. The lowly individual may be ridiculously wrong, and the high and mighty may be right — or *vice versa;* but the right and duty of private judgment is the life of democracy. And some of us devoutly believe that democracy is, under God, the hope of mankind; the hope of civilization and the arts; the

Digitized by Google

hope of the greatest of these arts, which is literature. A supercilious attitude towards the honest thinking of the plain people is snobbery. I like better the spirit of the following passage from Walter Pater's Essay on Style:

> Alive to the value of an atmosphere in which every term finds its utmost degree of expression, and with all the jealousy of a lover of words, he [the scholar] will resist a constant tendency on the part of the majority of those who use them to efface the distinctions of language, the facility of writers often reinforcing in this respect the work of the vulgar.

The scholar, I should like to think, will not abate his hostility to a usage that enfeebles the language and lowers its tone, even though a squad of callow candidates for the Ph.D. succeed by their researches in establishing, to the satisfaction of the professor who is their guide, that such is the usage of the masters.

Digitized by Google

## VI

### CONCORD

THE worm will turn! I suppose the aggressive reactionaries are sometimes in effect the best friends of progress. They may provoke a counter-reaction; or their attacks upon the tendencies they view with alarm may serve both to advertise a progressive movement and to make it conscious of itself. In my purblind devotion to the rules of grammar, perhaps I am gathering evidence which shall help to upset them! For indeed I find that the newspaper is not alone in bringing grammar into contempt; it is backed surprisingly often by its betters and mine. Yet be not hasty, my friend and critic! As the newspapers record the evil that men do, but give little account of the great everyday accumulation of the good, because such account would not be "news", so I note an "alleged" error here and there, but say nothing



Digitized by Google

of the innumerable cases in which men, if they do not respect the rules, at least conform to them.

Sing, goddess, of Concord! A finite verb "must" agree with its subject; but the newspaper says:

> From every Japanese home comes delicate tinklings from odd instruments. . . . The most common kind, is the samasin [*sic*]. It has a square body, covered with a tight cat-skin and a long black neck.

And Professor Lounsbury informs us that "Landor's reckless assaults upon the 'vernacular idiom' . . . furnishes a most amusing chapter in his stormy life."

It has been supposed that *neither . . . nor . . .* should be followed by a verb in the singular number; but Mr. Arthur Christopher Benson has said, "Neither our Lord nor Socrates seem to have thought . . ." A very prominent American novelist says that "Mrs. Dallam nor her house were not mentioned." The late William James wrote English, not Jamesesque, but he sometimes nods, as in " . . . neither [of three writers mentioned] seek to soften the abruptness . . ." Matthew Arnold has "Neither Leopardi nor Wordsworth are of the same order," and Newman

Digitized by Google

says of Empedocles and Oppian that "Neither were poets"!

A charming essayist speaks of "the sister arts of Grammar or Elocution", and the novelist quoted above has it that "Julius Cæsar or George Washington himself must have been somewhat ridiculous as bridegrooms."

Before exhibiting what I may call disagreement by attraction, I quote from a mighty hunter that ". . . we encountered the safari of an old friend, who, with Messrs. Brooks and Allen, were on a trip . . ." This kind of thing, I believe, is not uncommon.

In the following from a newspaper, the verb, instead of agreeing with its subject, is attracted to agree with the nearer noun, and changed to "go", accordingly:

> Split-second watches and careful timing . . . have established the fact that the average speed of many ground balls . . . go at the rate of almost 60 miles an hour.

The *Outlook* shows the same mistake in "But multiplying two wrongs do not make them right." "So far as converting the people are concerned" was copied from a Western weekly which died untimely by the hand of a Trust. I found in

Digitized by Google

*Harper's Weekly*, "The undertone of the articles . . . are noticeably hostile." A lady spoken of as "the first citizen of" no mean city says that "the biography of the saints have been," etc.

A different kind of "attraction", far too common, is exemplified by John Fiske's ". . . one of the most fascinating books of travel that was ever written", and his ". . . one of the most brilliant contributions to geology that has been made." Somebody writes, translating from Goethe, ". . . one of the best which has ever been written"; but an English translation should be English. (The use of "which" for *that* — a more pardonable error — will be considered in another connection.) It is convenient to print here the following fragment from "Modern Painters." Of the two outstanding faults, the second would properly be mentioned in a later chapter.

> . . . the snow-storm, one of the very grandest statements of sea-motion, mist, and light that has ever been put on canvas, even by Turner. Of course it was not understood; his finest works never are; but there was some apology for the public's not comprehending this, for few people have had the opportunity of seeing the sea at such a time, and when they have, cannot face it.

Digitized by Google

Ruskin does not mean that *statements has been put on canvas*, nor that *few people cannot face it*. He wrote wonderful English; but this, I think, is not English.

While we are on the subject of concords, it may be well to say that a pronoun of the third person should agree with its antecedent in number; and it is to be remembered that not only relatives, but personal and demonstrative pronouns of the third person referring to what precedes, properly have definite antecedents in the context. A writer who is recognized as a scholar by universities on both sides of the Atlantic hears "that everybody *is* reading Captain Hall's book, losing *their* temper," etc. (I have italicized two words.) The happy naturalist, John Muir, who could write so wonderfully well that vulgar errors are out of place in his work, speaks of "every tree" as "tossing their branches." A novelist says that "everybody was enjoying themselves." In a great weekly newspaper is the shocking sentence, "We shall understand at last that every man and woman who have their homes in cities is living in exile." In "Culture and Anarchy" it is set down that "teaching democracy to put its trust in achievements of this

Digitized by Google

kind is merely training them to be Philistines." To me, the easy harmony of a sentence is worth more than anything that is gained by such an irregularity, which in this instance could have been avoided without much change. And as for recasting sentences — why not! The world can afford to wait.

Grammarians have taught that a predicate substantive should agree with the subject in case. Those persons who defend "it is me" as idiomatic may approve of William James's "something that is not them." Such emancipated believers in (doubtful) usage need not object to ". . . that all dispatches of State which he may write will be *suaviter in modo* even when necessity demands that they be *fortiter in re*", which I quote from the *Congregationalist*. And a writer in the *Outlook* said that "The Anglo-Saxon may be *fortiter in re*, but the Oriental is certainly *suaviter in modo*." So Boston and New York "agree", for once. Taking leave to imitate the learned writers who thus enrich their English, I remark that these sentences, while they may be admirably in other respects, are very badly in syntax.

Most of the following extracts have accumulated since the first draft of this chapter was written:

Digitized by Google

There is, to be sure, the younger candidates of the Gaelic revival, but somehow too much of their work shows the shimmering hues of decadence rather than the strong colours of life. (Paul Elmer More.)

. . . as no one but the Little Chemist and the Curé were permitted to come in. . . (Sir Gilbert Parker.)

Neither of them were very familiar with the forest. (F. Marion Crawford.)

We may yet assume that the phenomena of mountain growth does not naturally lead to sudden disturbances of great violence. (N. S. Shaler.)

. . . that little group who had managed to get the control of affairs into its hands. (Woodrow Wilson.)

The parties which support these candidates, however, all agree in affirming that the election of its special favorite is the one thing that can give back peace to the distracted country.
(James Russell Lowell.)

As the men passed out, each one reached for his hat and oilskins hanging behind the wooden door, and waddling out stood huddled together in the driving rain like yellow penguins, their eyes turned skyward.
(F. Hopkinson Smith.)

. . . the souls of every man Jack. (Magazine writer.)

Digitized by Google

## VII

### MY ABRIDGMENTS

While camped by the boma . . . crows came familiarly around the tents. (Theodore Roosevelt.)

While camped on the 'Nzoi, the honey birds were almost a nuisance. (Roosevelt.)

While in this condition, war broke out between Spain and America. (*Outlook.*)

While [the crowd of sheep were] thus jammed, the Don and the shepherd rushed through the frightened crowd. (Muir.)

If chewed habitually, the teeth become red.

In a conspicuous place, if dining at an infantry mess, will be seen displayed the colors of the battalion. (Englishman.)

It was while revolving these pleasing reflections in my mind, that our friend Delorme walked across the stage in the fourth act. . . . (T. B. Aldrich.) [1]

[1] In the "Ponkapog Papers" he speaks of "the usual amusing solecism: 'As one of the most famous of American authors, I would like to possess your autograph.'" Is this much more absurd than his own words, quoted above?



Digitized by Google

The influence of the Southern states in the national politics was due mainly to the fact of their having a single interest on which they were all united, and, though fond of contrasting their more chivalric character with the commercial spirit of the North, it will be found that profit has been the motive to all the encroachments of slavery. (Lowell.)

So far, I have not said that any of the commonplace "abridgments" quoted above are wrong. What I do affirm is (1) that on general principles a speaker or writer should *express* what he has to say — not leave it for "the other fellow" to infer his meaning or guess at it; (2) that the *form* of a sentence should not imply that crows were "camped by the boma", or honey birds on the 'Nzoi; (3) that, if any structural part of a sentence is omitted, the sentence should be so framed as to show plainly *what* is omitted; (4) that the slovenly, or indolent, or insolent habit of not taking the trouble to express one's meaning in proper form tends to degrade our speech from the high level to which many ages of civilized intercourse have raised it, towards the grunt and grimace and unorganized language of the lowest savages. The presumption is always in favor of fulness and plainness.

Some of the ruder forms of utterance are

Digitized by Google

idiomatic and racy — they belong to the swift, hard-hitting speech of the people. But the elliptical forms I have been quoting do not appear in the speech of the plain people — nor, I think, in the easy conversation of the more scholarly. They are artificial and bookish and weak. Language may be forcible by completeness, as really as by condensation. It then conveys the perfect thought, and the mind is not distracted from the thought by having to supplement the expression.

It is freely admitted that men of much literature, like Mr. Gilder and our scholarly President Wilson, have made frequent use of these abridgments. For any who would go by the usage of their "betters", regardless of its intrinsic merit, there is no lack of usage to go by. Make the most of it.

I have reserved a few quotations along this line which especially interest me. From "The Winning of the West" comes the sentence, "While suffering from his wound, Howe disbanded the rifle corps." But it was Ferguson, not Howe, that had been wounded! I am sorry I cannot give due credit for "It is said that President Faüre opposed this action, and reports are current that if carried out he will resign." I should think he would. A great dramatic critic writes

Digitized by Google

of "Cooper, who died in 1851, when aged 62." Think of *saying* that! Our most prominent writer on naval affairs puts it that "Either of our divisions, therefore, was capable of blockading him, if caught in port; and it was no more than just to us to infer that, when once thus cornered, we should . . . assemble both divisions . . ." With the reader who likes that, I am not arguing. To a distinguished professor-diplomat I am indebted for this sentence: "When this regularity and proportion are violated, surprise is awakened, and, if trivial, the detection of the incongruity awakens the emotion of the ludicrous." "Very like"; at any rate the learned writer's statement has awakened "the emotion of the ludicrous." The following statement is "amusing" as well as "unconscious":

> He [Mr. Straus] is a Jew by birth and faith, and yet, when nominated by an amusing and unconscious irony, the convention burst into singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers . . ."

When a great writer is thus helped out by a gifted proof-reader, "it is to laugh."

In most of the cases here considered, the abridged clause consists, in skeleton, of a conjunction and a participle. Participles are extensively

Digitized by Google

used without the conjunction, where a clause would give the same general sense. For example, Mr. Thomas Hardy's sentence, "Suffering great anguish at this disloyalty . . . yet disposed to persevere in it, a horribly cruel thought crossed his mind", might begin with the words *While he was.* I shall therefore consider in this chapter what I call the *predicate participle.*

From young R. H. Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast": "The Easter holidays are kept up on shore for three days; and, being a Catholic vessel, her crew had the advantage of them." "Her crew", then, were "a Catholic vessel." One writer makes his sentence mean, grammatically considered, that the burdens and cares of aristocracy had never been educated for the throne; another, that communities are a new science; Dana, again, that the Italian language sailed out of Genoa, and that the owner of a badly damaged saddle was "capable of repair." A college boy may write a classic story of the sea, yet can hardly be expected to avoid the errors into which trained writers are so prone to fall. "Mentioning frijoles, . . . he went off to another building . . ." But it was the hungry Dana, not the Mexican, that had mentioned frijoles.

Digitized by Google

Mr. John Masefield: "Standing up hurriedly, the water rose above his boots. Looking up, an opening in the clouds showed him the moon, a beaten swimmer in a mill-race." The water stood up hurriedly, and an opening in the clouds looked up. "But being resolved to be a missionary somewhere," says the author of "Among Friends", "this determined the place." In Mr. John Graham Brooks's "As Others See Us", I read of "a gift . . . which carries its happy possessor through every vexation of the journey, apparently without discerning that anybody has bad manners." Here we have a verbal noun instead of a participle, but the same old confusion.

"Having returned his commission into the hands of the President, that official thanked him" is a pretty good illustration of the kind of sentence that will not stand alone. "Combined with mechanical ability of an unusual degree, he was an all-round musician." This is an extreme case, in that there is no word in the sentence with which, even if ours were an inflected language, the participle could properly be made to agree. "Lord Dennis had seen . . . many, too, the light of whose eyes had faded behind the shutters of that house, having drawn a blank." I am

Digitized by Google

very sorry that I cannot give due credit for this little masterpiece.

A foreign scholar, not very long in this country, wrote, "Even taken as a guess as to what I am going to do your reporter is mistaken." In view of the stuff that some of our native scholars write, a learned Dutchman can be forgiven for supposing that the sentence quoted is English. Perhaps that reporter might very well be "taken as a guess." "Having readily obtained information from him as to the barracks near by, we carried the conversation a little further." Thus Colonel Higginson; but there were only two persons — Higginson and his informant.

The following is from Mr. George Meredith's "Evan Harrington":

> We have been educated in a theory, that when you lead off with the bow, the order of nature is reversed, and it is no wonder therefore, that, having stripped us of one attribute, our fine feathers moult, and the majestic cock-like march which distinguishes us degenerates.

There may be readers who like Meredith so well as to like that English — of which he could hardly have been guilty in conversation. How much better is our speech than our "literature"! With

Digitized by Google

all its superficial faults, unstudied talk has both ease and force; and it has clearness, too, after its fashion. Moreover how perfectly distributed is the emphasis, how just the inflections, how masterly the management of pitch and cadence! We can all talk — if we have anything to say, we can talk well.

Digitized by Google

## VIII

### COMPARISONS ARE ODOROUS

I ONCE read in the *Ladies' Home Journal* that "Corn may be salted in a keg similar to the manner of salting cucumbers." The "fair authoress" meant well. So did William Black, when he wrote of certain persons ". . . as like each other in brain, costume, and manner as the wine-glasses before them." Walter Bagehot writes of "the level of honesty in legitimate business, as compared with other commercial nations of the present day." "This was a temperance ship," says the boy Dana, " . . . and, like too many such ships, the temperance was all in the forecastle." I will not waste criticism on the following, from writers of experience:

Compared with what he has experienced in America, Spain is a backward province. (Poultney Bigelow.)

Their step was not as steady, nor their files as straight, as Company A. (Winston Churchill.)



Digitized by Google

Like his master, he turned from beauty to life . . . but unlike him, his æsthetic revolt was complicated neither by spiritual mysticism, nor by conservative instincts. (Prof. Vida D. Scudder.)

Like other solitary lives, his chief happiness was in his friendships. (Mrs. Phelps Ward.)

There was, however, hardly a corner of England where orations on behalf of peace had a poorer chance than the Bucklandbury division.

(John Galsworthy.)

Just as Dr. Johnson said about writing, that no man was ever written down but by himself, so we are the victims not of circumstances but of disposition.

(Benson.)

A multitude of forms equal to Rubens in variety and facility of design. (Mrs. Humphry Ward.)

Many panics such as 1873 and 1893.

(Brooks Adams.)

A rate of speed much superior to the more distinctly fighting ships. (Mahan.)

The reader may possibly think that some of these expressions are defensible, but I suppose he will admit that it would be easy to rid each one of the defect which invites criticism.

I think most readers will agree with me if I say that in each of the following cases the slight change indicated in brackets would either partly or wholly do away with a fault:

Digitized by Google

. . . to know in what respect the Shakespearean sonnets differ from those of Milton, and his again from Keats or Rossetti [from Milton's . . . from those of K. or R.].

. . . there is no better means than by intelligent books of travel to free the mind from the intolerance that belongs to it by nature. . . . [Delete first "by."]

Lucretius, too, had great poetical genius; but his work evinces that his miserable philosophy was rather the result of a bewildered judgment than a corrupt. [Put the "rather" after "judgment."]

How much greater is our nation in poetry than [in] prose! —

This was due, not so much merely to lack of harmony between the two sets of professors, as between the Greeks and Germans in general. [Put the "not so much merely" after "harmony", and punctuate accordingly.]

We love and respect a man for infinitely more than for what he is now. [Delete the second "for."]

I have just been quoting from eminent writers; no wonder if the New-York *World* printed the following:

The Secretary says that at a conservative estimate the expense per effective rifle man in the United States Army is between two and five times as much as any first class power on the continent of Europe.

Digitized by Google

If "the Secretary says" such ridiculous things, he sins in very good company. The "authoress" of a book on American Literature in which I find the sentence "Like Puritanism in New England and Presbyterianism in Scotland, a development of worldly shrewdness ran parallel with spirituality" is a college professor, and should be a painstaking writer. From "The Appreciation of Literature" (George E. Woodberry), I quote:

> The experience of a great love is the most transforming power in life, and hence no type of story is so constant, so sure of interest, or so valuable.

The author has a certain "type of story" in mind, but there is in the context no mention of it; hence the comparison fails. A well-known reviewer has the paragraph:

> Unlike Lord Rossmore's book there is not a questionable anecdote in Dr. Hosmer's pages, and yet it is a very entertaining record.

I copy from an excellent article in the *Atlantic:*

> But the rulings which they thus developed were, perhaps, more regarding details than principles, more touching manners than morals.
>
> This is quite natural. They had more to do with details than with principles. They were expected to be more conversant with manners than with morals.
>
> (Elizabeth Woodbridge.)

Digitized by Google

The writer shows in the last two sentences that she is not averse to repeating a preposition. In the first sentence the two participles, really prepositions as used here, could not be repeated with the same effect of ease that is given by the repetition of the musical little word "with." But why should not the sentence have taken a different form? It might have read, *But the rulings which they thus developed perhaps regarded details more than principles, touched manners more than morals.* There is ellipsis here, of course; but an ellipsis, I believe, which is justified not only by usage but by good sense.

Specimens accumulate on my hands. I am content that the reader should pass judgment for himself:

To be told that we ought not to agitate the question of slavery, when it is that which is forever agitating us, is like telling a man with the fever and ague on him to stop shaking, and he will be cured. (Lowell.)

. . . making the room appear more like the chapel of a wonder-working saint than a prince's closet. (Mrs. Edith Wharton.)

It would be absurd to compare the words and actions of Tolstoy with the great names already cited, were it not that the Russian novelist is a true spokesman of certain tendencies of the age. (More.)

Digitized by Google

By so doing he did what he could to give to the war a character far higher even than a war of patriotism. (John T. Morse, Jr.)

The black eyes and transparently white complexions of the Greek ladies . . . contrast strangely with the fair women of many countries. . . . (Crawford.)

Digitized by Google

## IX

### COMPARISON AND COÖRDINATION

"More than any man in all Venice." Yet was not Gratiano a Venetian? Sure,[1] he could not speak more of "nothing" than the "infinite deal" that Gratiano spake! Well, Bassanio's reckless speech is quite in character. Shakspere's men and women do not talk book, like Fenimore Cooper's; for Shakspere recked his own rede, and held the mirror up to nature. But we, little men, write solemn nonsense in our own persons, without excuse or warrant. Colonel Higginson's beautiful words, ". . . whose deep, rich voice had in it more of mellow benignity than any voice I ever yet heard," are of course illogical. "Theodore Parker, who saw these issues more clearly than any man." But not even a Unitarian divine would exalt that son of thunder to be more than man. "R. H. Hutton, who probably exer-

[1] With this context, I may follow Shakspere's usage!



Digitized by Google

cised more power . . . than any man outside the cabinet." (Arnold White.) Going outside the sentence, we conclude that Hutton was not *in* the cabinet. I need not quote Bagehot, and I mark with an "O" (left over) more than one apposite quotation from Mr. Gilder's "Grover Cleveland, a Record of Friendship", and one each from Mr. Bliss Perry and Mr. H. M. Alden.

The opposite error: Charles Eliot Norton is quoted in a book advertisement as saying that "No *other* man of the country has done more to advance historical studies." The word I have put in italics shows that even so fine a scholar may be off his guard; this, of course, on the assumption that Norton is correctly quoted, and that he preferred to speak rationally. "It is a subject which of all others touches us most nearly" may properly be printed here. Yes, we all know — Milton did it! Any man who can write a Paradise Lost shall be free to do it.

There is no lack of guides for those who would steer a true course through the wilderness of English. A periodical named *Correct English* informs us that "The adjective 'other' is required" in the sentence, "No writer ever possessed a more individual and forceful style . . . than Carlyle."

Digitized by Google

The same publication gives "Rule 2", beginning, "When two or more nouns following each other . . .", and says that "*Cosmopolite* means a person equally at home any place in the world . . ."

If we turn back to Chapter VIII, we see that "a keg" cannot well be compared with "the manner of salting cucumbers", nor, in respect to "brain, costume, and manner", "certain persons" with "wine-glasses", nor "the level of honesty" with "other commercial nations", nor "ships" with "temperance", nor *experience* with "Spain." *Things* compared must have some kind of mutual correspondence in respect to actual or conceivable qualities, characteristics, etc. And if, *e.g.*, *qualities* are compared, there ought to be as many as two of them. We have seen in cases actually experimented upon that a bad comparison can be made good, or at least made less bad, by bringing about a rational *correspondence in form* between the expressions on which the comparison depends. In dealing with cases of bad *coördination* we likewise find the remedy to lie in effecting a proper correspondence; hence I deal in this connection with Coordinations.

Newman has, ". . . it follows that on the

Digitized by Google

one hand they [sciences] need external assistance, one by one, by reason of their incompleteness, and on the other that they are able to afford it to each other . . ." The mere correction of such work is a very rudimentary business. The inquiry whether or not Newman would have seriously defended his confusion — whether he really intended it — is more difficult. I can see nothing gained by it sufficient to outweigh the loss. He says somewhere that "A poetical mind is often too impatient to express itself justly!" I suppose the author of "Lead, kindly light" had a poetical mind.

The good divinity-school professor who writes that ". . . educators vacillate vaguely between trying to turn out moral boys and girls and successful beasts of prey" is not a careful writer, and probably does not pretend to be. "I want to learn", says Mr. Benson, "to distinguish between what is important and unimportant, between what is beautiful and ugly, between what is true and false." To the British academic mind the workmanlike construction of sentences may seem "unimportant", even as to some American minds certain widely-read essays seem unimportant. Be that as it may, it is impossible

Digitized by Google

to distinguish between "what is beautiful and ugly", or "between" any other one thing.

Mr. Morse, in ". . . the Republicans soon developed a strength beyond what had been expected and which put the Democrats to their best exertions", coördinates a relative clause with a prepositional phrase. Mr. Hopkinson Smith has an inelegant coördination in " . . . certain and it is to be hoped unrecorded bursts of profanity." Meredith's ". . . apostrophized by herself, her sister, and daughter" is awkward. He may have preferred to have it awkward. Having lost my documentary evidence, I will not name the author of "The game licked it, as well as coming to water."

The plucky young Dana might be forgiven for "Some persons we see under no remarkable circumstances, but whom, for some reason or another, we never forget"; but from our leading comic paper we expect at least better English than "Neither the army nor the public desired to see Captain Cutter convicted, but would have much preferred to see him cleared." That is quite bad enough for a congressman. Like it is a bit from Carlyle: " . . . no Truth or Goodness realised by man ever dies, or can die; but

Digitized by Google

is all still here . . ." Mr. Howells, it seems, can write as badly as Carlyle, when he gives his mind to it: "But she remembered an abolition visitor of whom none of them made fun, but treated with serious distinction and regard . . ."

*Claudite jam rivos, pueri, sat prata biberunt.*

Digitized by Google

## X

### CORRESPONDENTS

In a good book on Rhetoric, fifteen years old, I find mention of "the rule that connectives of the class known to grammarians as 'correspondents' — such as *not only, but also; either, or; neither, nor; both, and; on the one hand, on the other hand* — should be so placed as to show what words they connect." Of four dictionaries consulted, only the "International" mentions this use of the word *correspondents;* but the term is a convenient one, and I have no hesitation in following A. S. Hill and "Webster."

Under *both,* my dictionary says, "used before two or more coördinate words or phrases taken or considered inclusively, connected by *and* expressed or understood." Notwithstanding Milton's authority, passages in Chaucer and Goldsmith, occasional present usage, and the fact that it is very convenient to use *both . . . and . . . and*



Digitized by Google

like *et . . . et . . . et*, I find it so absurd to write *both* followed by more than two coördinate expressions that I think we should try to avoid so doing. It is a curious fact that several dictionaries specify "words or phrases", when *both* may with perfect propriety be used also before two coördinate clauses. *E.g.*, *He came both because it was a pleasure and because he believed it to be his duty.*

In such an expression as *both in thought and action*, the word *action* can hardly be said to be coördinate with the phrase *in thought.* We shall see that locutions of this kind are very common, even in the work of good writers. Postponing the question whether or not strict coördination should be insisted on, I exhibit first some uses of the "correspondents" that are certainly objectionable.

Mr. Birrell shall have the honor of coming first:

> Of English poets it may be said generally they are either born in London or remote country places.

It would be quite safe to say of poets or any other persons (1) that they are either born in London or born somewhere else, or (2) that they are born

Digitized by Google

either in London or somewhere else — *e.g.*, *in* remote country places. There is a great deal of usage, it must be admitted, to support one in saying (3) that they are born either in London or remote country places. The brilliant Birrell's way of putting it (4) may be "safe", but is hardly sane; and after "generally" there should be either a comma or a conjunction. From a book on Rhetoric, written by a scholar whose name (D. J. Hill) should give it a good deal of authority:

> Avoid all foreign words, unless they have been naturalized. This includes both words from the ancient and modern languages.

Here we have the same kind of irregularity: there is nothing coördinate with the second "words"; if "both" were put after "words", still there would be nothing coördinate with "from the ancient." And why not *the modern*, as well as "the ancient"? Good advice to a young writer: Avoid imitating the English of specialists in rhetoric or in anything else.

The "statesman" who said ". . . he was forewarned by both Mr. Underwood and by myself", not fearing to repeat the preposition, was perhaps the author of "we pulled him out

Digitized by Google

of the hole in the Sixty-first Congress", and of "either the Sixty-first or the Sixty-second Congresses." Professor Brander Matthews, too, does not fear to repeat the preposition, and his English matches the statesman's: ". . . they are likely to come into frequent collision with both the business man who wants the evil condition remedied in a hurry and with the professional politician . . ." Compare Lowell's "The society is reduced to the dilemma of either denying that the African has a soul to be saved, or of consenting . . ." I could cite many passages from Lowell in which the coördination is imperfect.

"They spared neither the wounded nor recognized the Red Cross" speaks for itself. So does "Neither Miles, Eagan, Shafter or Corbin are West Pointers." "Their authority, both as regards the reception or rejection of locutions of any sort, is final" (Lounsbury) is a sentence which I suppose would require the support of high "authority" to make it pass as English. One of the prophets of our time has these sentences:

> But surely the shout of triumph hailing that event was not expressive either of political indifference nor political loyalty.

Digitized by Google

He would have a surplus with God, with which he could either pay up the debts contracted through former sins or which he could turn over to the general treasure of merit on which the weak and sinful could bank.

A bright college professor who, it is to be assumed, knows better than she writes:

Neither Bulwer nor Trollope nor Reade nor Wilkie Collins evolved nor discovered a hero.

Neither poetry nor prose draws its social passion from her inspiration, nor solves its social problems through her aid.

"Physical facts", wrote William James, "simply are or are not; and neither when present or absent, can they be supposed to make demands."

Mr. Cooper says "both on its technical and its artistic side," but also, "both in my own case and in that of other writers." He has "work that not only meant drudgery but that took us away from bigger and finer things"; and ". . . that have either never been set down on paper at all or else have gone speedily into the scrap-basket"; and he quotes from Stevenson, "I would either read, or a pencil and a penny version-book would be in my hand." I do not

Digitized by Google

mean that all these are equally bad, or are necessarily bad at all. I am exhibiting usage. From three good writers of the present time I quote "both of the gay Latin races and the sad Teutonic", "the drama neither of knight nor monk", "whether in a contemporary or historical range", "whether in the sphere of manners or history", "whether in the form of practical action or of moral precept." From Professor Lounsbury: " . . . sharing neither in its thoughts, its desires, nor its acquisitions"; "They know what they need; and they can neither be persuaded out of it nor bullied out of it"; "It hardly needs to be said that 'the man in the street' is not only no director of usage, but that he has no direct influence upon the preservation of the life of any word or phrase."

Of the quotations yet to be given, some, at least, have weight as bearing on the question of usage. Matthew Arnold:

> Those who deny this, either think so poorly of the State . . . or they think so poorly of religion . . .

Characteristically enough, Arnold does not *omit* anything — he uses a (grammatically) superfluous pronoun. Andrew Lang:

Digitized by Google

But such anecdotes are either not common, or are not frequently reported.

William James:

. . . that not only . . . do we find our passional nature influencing us in our opinions, but that there are . . .

. . . neither to be enjoyed nor understood.

. . . whether to whole or parts.

Mrs. Humphry Ward:

. . . whether as upholstery or conversation.

. . . in defiance both of his English and Irish creditors.

Mr. Birrell:

But still, both as a poet and a man we must give place, and even high place, to Pope.

Walter Pater:

There are many such figures both in Coleridge's prose and verse.

Ruskin:

. . . which can neither be eaten nor breathed . . .

. . . both on the manufacture and the sale . . .

. . . expressive both of velocity and power.

I find similar irregularities in the work of Newman, Van Dyke, Galsworthy, Black, Gilder,

Digitized by Google

Chesterton, McCarthy, Dole, Crothers, Henry B. Fuller, Professor Raleigh, A. C. Benson, Perry, Swinburne, Fiske, Mrs. Wharton, Allen, Crawford, Mrs. Riggs, and I know not how many others.

I have read through, to find out how the correspondents are handled in it, a book of some 450 pages, containing, with introductory matter by a competent writer, selections from the best essays of Bacon, Swift, Addison, Lamb, De Quincey, Carlyle, Emerson, Macaulay, Ruskin, and Matthew Arnold. It is not easy to read such prose without getting interested; and perhaps I did not so master my attention as to note every case in which the correspondents are used. I believe, however, that my totals are substantially correct. No case noted was so bad, I believe, as, for instance, the first one cited in this chapter. In the introductory matter, the regular uses observed were to the irregular as one to three. For the main text, the corresponding ratio is of fourteen to nineteen — more than twice as great. Bacon and Swift are steadily on the irregular side; Macaulay has an even score, Ruskin's is practically even, and Arnold is regular every time. It is perhaps significant that for Emerson I got

Digitized by Google

no figures, one way or the other; and for Macaulay, De Quincey, and Lamb, almost none. This very slight investigation proves nothing; but its results harmonize well enough with the conclusions which I shall modestly set down.

With respect to the use of the so-called correspondents, what is the standard by which we should judge the work of others, and to which we should conform in our own writing?

Considered from the grammarian's point of view, such coördinations as the following are certainly correct:

> Neither here nor there; either in the city or in the country; whether by little or by much; not only according to law, but also according to justice; both because I feared and because I hoped.

They are normal, symmetrical, complete, and perfect forms of expression. "I looked neither forward nor back" is *clearer* than "I neither looked forward nor back." "They are either born in London or remote country places" is harder to understand than "they are born either in London or in remote country places." No great difference? There is no great difference between lifting two pounds and lifting one pound; but I will not have my shoes weighted with lead. In the single

Digitized by Google

and simple case, no great difference; but construct a complicated sentence in defiance of the laws of thought, or a long discourse with constant disregard of what is normal in structure and formally clear, and the reader will be wearied and repelled, unless your work is in other respects so good as to please him in spite of your slovenliness — and even if you please him, very likely you will have failed to make him understand you, and thereby to persuade or convince or instruct him as you would wish to do.

Now it is generally practicable and even easy, provided one cares to do so, to make one's coördination correct and clear. The worker in words has an advantage over the cabinet-maker. The stuff he works in is not like pine and mahogany. Experiment, alter, knock to pieces, reconstruct or throw away — no material has been wasted or spoiled. The only expenditure needed here is of time and labor.

At this point two objections may be made. The first is that the time and strength of our betters are too valuable to be wasted in finicky pottering with phrases. Suppose this to be true: it would apply to a few writers who have done, or possibly are doing, great creative work, and in

Digitized by Google

some measure to a limited number whose work, though not of the first order, is good enough to last; and a multitude who write for the million and are read by the million, and whose work affects mightily and in many ways the thinking, the moral health, the conduct of the million, would remain to be considered. We — you and I — should remain to be considered. But now about the greater wits: Some of them have deemed so highly of form and finish that they have put infinite labor into learning their trade, or finishing their product, or both. About writers of this kind, my friend in the opposition, you need not worry. I spoke of learning the trade. *Pace* Dogberry, "to write and read" neither in the lower nor in the higher sense "comes by nature." The great wits learn to write, and they learn by hard work; and to learn a little matter like what we are speaking of in this chapter is the merest trifle to any one who is clever enough to write and who cares to learn.

The second objection, which might seem to find support in the passage from De Quincey quoted in my third chapter, is in brief that painstaking correctness is an enemy of spontaneity. Now, really, such objection would be puerile

Digitized by Google

were it not put, as De Quincey very properly puts it, in carefully guarded language. Can any person who knows the least thing about serious writing object to *revision?* And can any such person fail to see that spontaneity comes in the first draft; and that if it is good for anything it will not evaporate under the process of licking the first draft into shape; and that if it is spontaneous foolishness the cooler-headed reviser will rejoice to pitch it into the waste-basket; and that the pleasant impersonal work of getting the detail of a composition into shape has as much to do with the quality of spontaneity as polishing up "the handle of the big front door" has with the architect's happy treatment of dormer windows or balconies!

The conversational style of a thoroughly cultivated person is *correct* and *easy*. So far forth, that style is a model for literature of every grade; which, of course, may be and should be more carefully finished in both respects. I am now ready to set down some conclusions of my own with reference to "Correspondents."

1. As a rule, regular coördination is safe.

2. *Other things being equal*, the presumption is always strong in favor of regularity.

Digitized by Google

3. Provided, always, that the sense be clearly indicated, if regularity in any given case would involve sacrifice of ease, it need not be insisted on.

4. The young writer, learning his business, should stick at no pains that will enable him to avoid irregularity without sacrificing ease.

Digitized by Google

# XI

## THE PRONOUN

*Thou pale and common drudge*

SCHOLARS ought to be friendly to the pronoun. So long as we can point with pride to its three cases, let no man say that English is "a grammarless tongue"! For me, who have no use for "anyone" and the like, the pronoun is mostly monosyllabic — a fact greatly to its credit. It is a very convenient and "handy" little drudge; and — although there are who seem to find great beauty in the personal pronouns of the first person — it is "pale" as well as "common." Its plainness may not move me "more than eloquence", but when it (the pronoun) makes the meaning plain, it gives solid satisfaction. It is related to the noun somewhat as checks to money. If the noun is there, like cash in bank, its representative is legitimately useful. If I can find nothing for the pronoun to represent, I decline to indorse.



Digitized by Google

**This small part of speech is hard worked, at the best. Expected to convey ideas which the user, even if he ever had them clear in his own head, has been too stupid or lazy or preoccupied** to indicate in the context, it is overworked and misused. The writer whose pronouns are always right is pretty sure to make safe English.

An American Academician, whose progress through the English language makes one think of a bull moose, wishes "to state with all emphasis that no man who takes the opposite ground to that which I have taken . . . has any right to be on the bench, and it is a misfortune to have him there." Here the antecedent of "him" is not omitted — it is "no man." If one says that *any man . . . has no right,* "any man" stands for an existent person, and may be represented by a pronoun. Although "him" evidently cannot represent "no man", it may be said that "man who takes . . ." is the antecedent; but "no man" (Latin *nemo*) is the subject just as in my sentence "any man" is the subject, and the subject is what the pronoun should have as its antecedent. In this connection I will quote from a young sailor, an old scholar, a great art-critic, and the New-York *World:*

Digitized by Google

1. No Protestant has any political rights, nor can he hold property. (Dana.)

2. . . . no one spoke of any probable end of the voyage . . . or if he did . . . (Dana.)

3. How far these injunctions have affected the practice of the great writers of the last hundred years no one has taken the pains to inform us, even if he has informed himself. (Lounsbury.)

4. No previous work of the nature, so far as I can discover, contained even an allusion to the locution under discussion. Their compilers. . . . (Lounsbury.)

5. . . . few people have had the opportunity of seeing the sea at such a time, and when they have, cannot face it. (Ruskin.)

6. He speaks no English when he can avoid it.

I remark first upon these quotations severally. There are at least three easy ways in which "1." could be slightly changed so that there need be no question of the proper use of pronouns. "2.", also, could be easily changed with the same result. In "3.", the last clause is nearly equivalent to a "conditional relative" clause depending on "one", and possibly need not be condemned. I see no justification for the use of "Their" in "4." To say nothing just now of the negative "No", there is no antecedent plural to justify the plural pro-

Digitized by Google

noun. In "5.", a pronoun *they* for subject of "cannot" would perhaps make the sentence better; but a pronoun so used ought to refer to "few people" in the sense in which that expression was used — so that to say *they* "cannot face it" would be too much like saying that *few people cannot face it*, which logically implies that the great majority of people *can* "face it"! "6." What does "it" mean? "English"? No. Speaking "no English"? No. The writer means that he *never speaks English when he can avoid it* — *i.e.*, can avoid speaking English. This last is approximately rational. A word more about "4." The phrase "of the nature" does not sound like English. *Of the kind* is well justified by usage; not so, I think, "of the nature." The series of abstract nouns in "an allusion to the locution under discussion" is entirely unnecessary, and it is neither easy nor forcible. Some of the young sailor's rattling, racy monosyllabic sentences show to great advantage in comparison with such language.

What are we to say in general of sentences like *No man can do impossibilities, and he is foolish if he tries?* I have been surprised to find that I had so few of these in my collection; I am

Digitized by Google

glad to believe that the better class of writers avoid the inconsistency we are considering. If a man has been mentioned in the near context, and without lack of clearness the pronoun *he* may be used instead of repeating the noun, the pronoun is right. If the subject of the sentence is *no man*, to represent that subject by *he* is on the face of it a contradiction of terms. It is best to speak and write logically and grammatically. The burden of proof is upon him who holds that it is right — as in many cases it may be — to speak and write otherwise. The question is not whether an anomalous expression *may* be used, but whether it *need* be used. It should be insisted on again and again that if two forms of expression are both open to criticism, the chances are very large that something else would be better than either. Begin anew, and hammer out for yourself a sentence to which you can think of no reasonable objection. So a young writer learns his trade, and so a veteran keeps his style fresh and clean.

I give next some extracts labeled in my collection "*They* singular."

The true gentleman in like manner carefully avoids

A second *his* might be somewhat objectionable —

Digitized by Google

**whatever may cause a jar or a jolt . . . his great concern being to make every one at their ease and at home. (Newman.)**

**not, however, on account of its gender. But why use a pronoun? If not *at ease and at home*, then *feel at ease and at home*.**

. . . there is nothing one would more desire for a person or a document one greatly values than to make them independent of miracles. (Arnold.)

Here there is more excuse for the plural pronoun, but no sufficient excuse. Either recast the sentence, or write *than independence of miracles*.

Any one can measure with a glance, when they are tired. (Ruskin.)

One should avoid writing when "they are" too "tired" to write well.

No person could have told from the heavens, by their eyesight alone, that it was not a still summer night. (Dana.)

Not *the eyesight of the heavens*, young man! Delete "their." Make any one of several easy changes. Make your sentence English.

"Anybody might see that was a unnat'ral creed." [Quoted from a novel.]
So they might. (Agnes Repplier.)

Trust the brilliant Miss Repplier to work out a better form of expression — if she would.

"Oh God, that any one should put an enemy in their mouth to steal away their brains." [Supposed to be quoted from Othello, Act II, Sc. 3.] (Lord Avebury; better known as Sir John Lubbock.)

"O that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains." So it reads in the play. The penitent Cassio speaks the English of a gentleman; my lord's memory and his English are both at fault.

Many a misused "it" awaits us under Clearness. A few instances may be noticed here.

Digitized by Google

"Education is a broad term. Only a small part of it is done in schools." Is it hypercritical to object to the suggestion of *a small part of a broad term?* And how about *doing* education? A newspaper, speaking of "the Wall street democrats", says that "with the aid of all the servile agents of plutocracy it did its best." From Mrs. Humphry Ward one expects better things:

> She could make a daring sally or reply; but it was still the raw material of conversation; it wanted ease and polish. And she was evidently conscious of it herself, for presently her cheek flushed and her manner wavered.

Conscious of "a daring sally or reply"? Miss Jane Addams has it that "everybody is under obligations to his alderman, and is made to feel it"; and is in the good company of Matthew Arnold, who says, ". . . we are so notoriously deficient in everything of that kind, that our adversaries often taunt us with it."

The relative pronoun meets with hard "usage":

> The past few days has witnessed many arrivals who are to remain.

This deserves attention. We will not quibble about the number of the leading verb. The

Digitized by Google

"witnessed" is rather in the "fine" journalistic style, but let that pass. The way "arrivals" is made to look both ways is good. Abstract and concrete at once, it shows the power of language! A bright novelist speaks of "a garrison who has made honorable surrender"; and "who" looks both ways; it serves as *who* and *which* in one. Miss Addams has the same use in "the large manufacturing company who desires", etc. The following is from the editor of an English classic:

> The characters which people his story are real, and the settings what he saw, and a large part of which he was.

The hackneyed allusion to a passage in the second Æneid is brought in by too great a strain upon syntax and style.

It is no easy task to make a good text-book. In the preface to a "Practical Rhetoric", the third sentence begins, "To which number the present volume presumes to add one . . ." On page 204 the author says that "Nowadays . . . the relative is used only inside the sentence." This must mean, I suppose, that the relative is not used to introduce a new sentence. But in the first sentence quoted, "which" introduces

Digitized by Google

a new sentence. Surely the professor would not quibble over the *position* of the word.

Aldrich, in the "Ponkapog Papers," speaks of "five sons, the second of which sought a career in London." Professor Shaler says that "commerce in our time binds lands together in a way which it did not of old", and works the objective case, I think, too hard.

> She . . . came down stairs wrapped up and looking altogether a different person from whom she had been hitherto. . . . (Hardy.)

The Standard Dictionary speaks of *look* (in the above sense) as "followed properly by an adjective"; and I think the S. D. is right. The relative "whom" is here used as if, like *what*, it carried the sense of both antecedent and relative. Surely it does not; and surely a form which is in the objective case, and can be in no other, cannot properly stand as a predicate nominative. Mr. Hardy, critic of other present-day writers, should "look to hum."

The *locus classicus* "whom say ye that I am", very properly corrected in the Revised Version, has many parallels in recent English. One of our very brightest weeklies has "Ambassadors

Digitized by Google

whom we are sure will do us credit", and John Fiske makes the same slip. I need not print the sentences before me in which "*whom* nominative" is used by W. E. Griffis and by a former President, not to speak of several popular novelists. On the other hand, I copy this from an English Grammar:

> The interrogative pronoun *who* may be said to have no objective form in spoken English. We regularly say, "*Who* did you see?" or, "*Who* were they talking to?" etc.

and

> In literary English the objective form *whom* is *preferred* for objective use.

Seven quotations are given to show *who* used as object; but most of them are the English of *characters*, not of authors. To quote Kingsley, for instance, as authority for "He hath given away half his fortune to the Lord knows who" (even if we admit that this illustration illustrates) would be like charging Dickens with misuse of *mutual* because he named a novel with words spoken by a *character* in the novel. If authors are to be responsible for all their characters say (or even for its colloquial correctness), why not also for all they do! It so happens that I have

Digitized by Google

in my collection but one example of the use of *who* objective. Thomas Hardy says in his own person, ". . . who should he see coming down the hill but his father in the light wagon . . ." Perhaps Mr. Hardy customarily uses this construction in his "spoken English"; perhaps, on the other hand, he uses it in "Under the Greenwood Tree", p. 143, because he is, so to speak, in spirited narrative style *identifying* himself with his rustic "hero."

I venture the opinion that at least in the eastern part of the United States there are a good many thousands of persons in whose spoken English such expressions as "Who did you see?" are carefully avoided; and that many of these persons are not only well-bred, but bright and racy in their talk. Not only is the schoolmaster abroad, but the college professor (of either sex) is in evidence; and sometimes the scholarly professor is gifted with considerable wit and social competency. Such an one, in spite of football and the rest, makes his mark on many an undergraduate destined to be a social leader; and makes his mark none the less if he has no more than a discriminating fondness for the English of livery-stables and "the bleachers."

Digitized by Google

Four more specimens:

. . . conditions which, if you break, will straightway narrow the flow of your life.

. . . what is *not* in the Bible, but they have put it there.

. . . what is a main object of these pages to point out is . . .

Not but what young men are still young men.

In the first, a good writer has "saved" a pronoun (*them*) by making "which" subject of one verb and object of another. The next, from Matthew Arnold, of course, may no doubt be defended for its self-contradictory form. What is not defensible, I think, is the coördination. The third, from Henry Drummond, "saves" one pronoun, *it*, at the expense of formal clearness, idiom, and ease. The last is from a recent number of *Scribner's Magazine*, and was the work, I suppose, of a staff writer. On dictionary authority, one might hold that this quotation has no place under the subject of Pronouns; for the Standard on page 2701 (edition of 1913) unqualifiedly gives *what* as a conjunction. Two uses are specified by number. Of the first use, "he gave them money, *what* he had" is given as an illustration; and on this I leave the reader to make his own comment.

Digitized by Google

Under "2.", the "conjunction" *what* is defined as meaning *that*, and there is a cross-reference to *but what*. If the reader turns over a good many pounds of pages, he finds on page 361 the information (!) that *but what* is an incorrect expression. I shall continue to think that *what* is always properly to be regarded as a pronoun, and is grossly misused in this extract from one of our best monthlies.

Speaking of the double use of *which:* In Hardy's "Under the Greenwood Tree" I read of "that ancient and broad humour which our grandfathers, and possibly grandmothers, took delight in, and is in these days unquotable." Wouldn't Mr. Hardy call this "slipshod"?

The line, "The man that has plenty of good peanuts", illustrates perfectly the restrictive use of the relative — a use of which the relative *that* has no monopoly, but to which it is well adapted, and mostly confined. If it were altogether given up to this use, clearness might be promoted; yet there are relative clauses that seem to be on the border — partly restrictive and partly not. Such a clause is seen in a sentence quoted by some one from Addison: "He was often tempted to pluck the flowers that rose

Digitized by Google

everywhere about him in the greatest variety." An important consideration in favor of using *that* in place of *who* or *which*, provided it will satisfactorily express the thought, is the lightness of the word, its unpretentiousness and informality. It belongs to the speech of the plain people, so often a model both of ease and of force. Other things being equal, the strength (force) of a sentence may be said to vary inversely as the number, length, and (so to speak) self-consciousness of its words; and this proposition will hold largely, also, for ease. *Who* is an excellent word, in its place. *Which* is a very convenient word, but far from melodious; it is to be used in moderation. How good and how suggestive is Hamlet's advice to the players: "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue", and the rest of it!

When Mr. Brooks speaks of "more damaging criticism than any which he puts into verse," it is not easy to see why *that* should not be used. Still harder is it to justify "who" in Mr. Morse's "People often call him [Lincoln] the greatest man who ever lived", and "He was the most individual man who ever lived." Colonel Higginson has "No man who ever lived was more

Digitized by Google

universally claimed as a typical Englishman than Walter Savage Landor." If "who" was to be retained, it might have been put after "lived." The relative *that* would have been good, I think, in Meredith's sentence: "He deserved some commendation for still holding up his head, but it was love and Rose who kept the fires of his heart alive."

Digitized by Google

## XII

### SOME MATTERS OF SYNTAX

I HAVE a good many extracts labeled "C. C. S.", Causal Clause Substantive. "Because this young man thinks well of you isn't reason enough for you to kiss him", while it conveys an important truth, might seem to express it in "a questionable shape." An eminent physician says that "It is not because the odor is bad that makes onions healthy." And the great *Century Magazine* declares that "because methods are advancing does not prove them to be desirable." The author of "The Craftsmanship of Writing" (Mr. Cooper) says:

> The real secret of his [Henry James's] obscurity lies much deeper. It is because he is attempting to pursue his analysis of the human heart and soul to an unattainable point.

I don't know why "It is because" should not be cut out; nor why "attempting" should be



Digitized by Google

used instead of *trying*. If, as I suppose, the pronoun refers to "secret", why not use *that*, or *in that*, or *in the fact that*, in place of "because"?

Mr. Crothers writes that "Because he must work hard with an uncertainty about the results, is no reason why he should not yield . . ." Messrs. A. C. Benson, John Graham Brooks, Robert A. Woods, and Henry Van Dyke all have *the reason is because*, or *the reason why is because*, or the like — yet I am unconvinced.

Mr. Woodberry says in "The Appreciation of Literature" that "One reason of the facility with which the historical novel is written is because this outer theme . . . is in itself great . . ." Whatever may be true of the reason given *for* a thing, it seems clear enough that the reason *of* a thing is that *because of which* the thing is, takes place, etc. Substitute *that* for "because" in the fragment quoted above, and the statement is correct. If the word "reason" be taken to refer to *the language used in stating a reason*, it is not, I think, too much to ask that this special sense should be in some way explicitly indicated. In Latin the word *quod* is used to introduce either a causal clause or a strictly substantive clause; but *quod* is a very different word from *because*, and

Digitized by Google

seems originally not to have been used in the causal sense. Moreover the distinction between a reason stated as a fact and a reason given as alleged or conceived by somebody is neatly made in Latin by a difference in the mode of the verb. In English, this convenient means is not available. In the case with which we are dealing it seems plain that "this outer theme . . . is in itself great" is intended as a statement of fact; if so, the conjunction *that* would be exactly right.

No one would question the correctness of expressions like *I remember his coming to the city*, and *on account of their being unable to proceed;* and probably to most intelligent readers our Mr. Churchill's "the miracle of him staying there where Providence had placed him" would seem wrong, if their interest in the story did not prevent their attending to the English of it. I have before me an advanced English grammar whose authors profess to find in "good literature" "*the real basis of grammar.*" In considering the question, "should the possessive case of a noun or pronoun always be used with the gerund to indicate the active agent?" — a question which does not cover the ground; and what kind of a thing would an *inactive* agent be! — they

Digitized by Google

say, "it will be noticed that the possessive of the pronoun is more common than that of the noun"; but in their quotations from "good literature" the pronoun is every time in the possessive. On the other hand, when young Dana says "I heard of but one vessel's being driven ashore here", we are perhaps as sure the construction is right as when similar expressions are cited from De Quincey, Carlyle, and Thoreau. But, not to speak of half-a-dozen great writers whom I find quoted as using the objective case of the noun with the gerund in *ing*, I happen to have six passages from Newman and three from Ruskin, besides one each from Professor Lounsbury, Mr. Gilder, Mr. Howells, and Mr. John Graham Brooks, in all of which I find the objective of the noun. I quote from Howells on account of the comparison afforded:

> . . . that there is a measure of the same absurdity in his trampling on a poem, a novel or an essay that does not please him as in a botanist grinding a plant underfoot because he does not find it pretty.

Of course "botanist grinding" is more euphonious than *botanist's grinding* would be; but I think I see a further reason for the choice of cases in this passage. One sentence from Newman:

Digitized by Google

It [Theology] has *primâ facie* claims upon us, so imposing, that it can only be rejected on the ground of those claims being nothing more than imposing, that is, being false.

Not to speak of the needlessly misplaced "only", I cannot admire the effect of the five words ending in *ing*. How easily his "being" might have been avoided, the reader will readily see. Illustrations should illustrate; here is a sentence which I find quoted from Macaulay to show the construction with the gerund:

We think with far less pleasure of Cato tearing out his entrails than of Russell saying, as he turned away from his wife, that the bitterness of death was past.

It seems pretty clear that Macaulay's "tearing" and "saying" are not gerunds, but participles. It is unfortunate that, as participle and gerund are identical in form, we cannot *know* what he meant. If there is any serious doubt, Macaulay's reputation for clearness must suffer. A newspaper clipping shows how the use of the gerund, here perfectly needless, may spoil a sentence:

Col. Roosevelt, in his Auditorium speech, said that the ultimate end of justice in a nation cannot be

Digitized by Google

achieved without the individual men making up the nation being themselves for righteousness.

1. The possessive of the personal pronoun with the gerund is certainly right. There is no need of using the objective of the personal pronoun with the gerund; and it ought to be reserved for use with the present participle, as in *I shall always remember him sitting erect on his coal-black charger* — not the fact that he sat, but *him*. 2. The possessive of the noun is certainly right; but it is not always convenient to use the possessive. The newspaper English quoted above shows an extreme case, where the possessive simply cannot be used; but there are many cases of option, where one may well hesitate to use it. I note that of the extracts in my collection which bear upon this point, six, in which the possessive is not used, would not show that case in reading aloud, even though it were indicated in print; and it is always unfortunate, except for the "funny man", if the spoken word does not "make good." Moreover, if a difference of meaning between the two uses can sometimes be perceived, the verb being made more prominent by the possessive, the noun by the objective, that is a reason for keeping up the two.

Digitized by Google

"She stood and watched him walk away" ("A Chance Acquaintance") was written, I believe, some forty years ago. I doubt if the dean of American letters would write such a sentence now, any more than he would submit to the infliction of the dreadful woodcuts which then were supposed to "illustrate" the text. "Awhile she watched the sapphire waters break" is by a younger novelist, Mr. Churchill. Unlike the other, it was probably put in "prose-poetry" form with conscious intention. The same author, in a less inspired moment, wrote ". . . and watch the bob-tailed horse-cars go by." Mr. Marion Crawford and Mr. Bliss Perry have the same use of *watch;* also Mrs. Humphry Ward, if I mistake not. This probably is English, but to me it does not seem good. Much worse, I think, are expressions like *witness them play ball*, or "witness the hounds drive him." Mr. Woodrow Wilson wrote "He reads books as he would listen to men talk"; I found in *Life* ". . . listen to some distinguished author read from his own works"; and you may hear any street arab yell "Look at 'im run!" Matthew Arnold has "will find his work live", and "make him announcing"; George Meredith, ". . . as we mark Mr.

Digitized by Google

Evan Harrington step into the fair society of the drawing-room"; and John Henry Newman, "Not that we should not feel pleased and proud to find Catholics distinguish themselves." If any reader thinks that my own citations are of sufficient authority to prove me in the wrong — there is no law against thinking so.

Probably most persons who are familiar with the phrase "sequence of tenses" think of what it stands for as belonging to the syntax of the Latin language. It has seemed to me that in real English there is less freedom as to combination of tenses than in Latin. Certainly our idiom is such that a foreigner learning the language needs to be careful lest he get his tenses "mixed." Certainly, too, we who are to the manner born do not always handle our tenses with a sure touch. And the Revisers of 1611, however inferior in scholarship to the students of our time, showed by their free treatment of the Greek aorist a feeling for English tense which, I suppose, has something to do with the superiority of their version of the New Testament, in point of style, to the version of 1885.

McCarthy has a sentence so harsh in its use of tenses that I have studied it lest I might be mistaken in the meaning:

Digitized by Google

Mill was one of the few men who have only to be convinced that a thing was incumbent on them as a public duty to set about doing it forthwith, no matter how distasteful it might be to them personally, or what excellent excuses they might offer for leaving the duty to others.

The *Outlook* has imperfect for pluperfect in "The Mohegan was a new steamship, and was formerly known on another line as the Cleopatra." By the use of *had been* for the second *was*, the time-relations would be properly indicated. Mr. Howells, Mr. Crawford, and Sir Gilbert Parker use aorist for pluperfect. Newman:

He [St. Philip Neri] lived at a time when pride mounted high, and the senses held rule; a time when kings and nobles never had more of state and homage, and never less of personal responsibility and peril. . . .

Does he use "had" for *had had*, or does he mean, letting idiom take the blame of his formless sentence, to convey that kings and nobles never had more state, etc., before or after that time?

Matthew Arnold writes (quoting John, VIII, 42), "If God was your father . . ." Here the English of the Authorized Version was both correct and, as usual, good; and in the Revised Version the "were" is of course retained. A

Digitized by Google

good many years ago Professor A. S. Hill, unqualifiedly condemning such use of the indicative for the subjunctive, said, "In England this use of the indicative is found in good authors, and seems to be gaining ground." We in America, at least, are not bound by British usage; and every thoughtful user of words owes it to his mother tongue to maintain useful distinctions rather than help do away with them. In a case like this I suppose there is not even the commercial reason which induces some of our leading publishers to "favour" the use of variant spellings like "honourable." I have half-a-dozen quotations from Professor Brander Matthews in which he thus uses *was* for *were*. Lowell has " . . . when it seemed to the people as if there was nothing more important at stake than who should be in and who out . . ."

I know no sufficient reason for using any of the following mixed forms:

. . . it seems as if nothing but romantic sentiment can unite them.

. . . the figures roll up as if they mean to go . . .

It seems, too, as if the very greatness of our tools and of our ambitions tends to raise the mind above mean conceptions of life. (Professor George A. Coe.)

Digitized by Google

. . . they tend to speak as if only some coldness and hardness of nature . . . holds men and women back . . . (Benson.)

Change these sentences into English — a child can do it — and the thought will be well expressed. Here is something different, from Newman:

Their eyes are opened; and . . . they see . . . a magic universe, out of which they look back upon their former state . . . as if they were then but fools, and the dupes of imposture.

Spare to us, English cousins, the subjunctive *were*, in present conditions contrary to fact! And pray forbear to "work it" for the sense of *had been*. Mr. Fuller has a like use of *were*, with more excuse (as it avoids repetition); but I am not sure that he makes any net gain in ease:

The Prorege . . . would have been well enough pleased . . . were not every puff that filled the Adria's wide-spread sails carrying him . . .

Here belong the following quotations:

He . . . would not have cared to make any display . . . even if he had the gift. (McCarthy.)

Many of them would perhaps rather have voted with Mr. Disraeli . . . if they could see their way. (McCarthy.)

Digitized by Google

I clutched my gun, half angrily, as if it was to blame . . . (Burroughs.)

. . . it would seem to the layman as if the courts have sometimes fallen short . . . (President Hadley.)

If it were true that each man's mental horizon were bounded by his class interests . . . (Hadley.)

The English language has not yet lost the power to give the exact sense in cases like these. *I clutched my gun as if it had been to blame* is practically clear, it is exact, and it is English. *Were* would be better than "was", but naturally refers to present time. It is true that in Latin the imperfect subjunctive in condition, corresponding to our *were, may* refer to past time; but the ambiguities of another language do not justify needless ambiguities in English. I believe an advanced English grammar which lies on my table does not go too far in saying that this subjunctive *were* is "still a required form of the English language", and has "no reference to past time." The second quotation from President Hadley is given because instead of using *was* for *were,* he uses the second *were,* correctly enough, where most speakers and writers would use *is* or *was.* This use of *was,* if defended at all, must be defended, I take it, as idiomatic.

Digitized by Google

Of the extracts that follow, the first three are naturally grouped with conditional sentences; the rest may as well be given here, perhaps, as elsewhere.

It begins to look as though the immunity from prosecution which the express companies have so long enjoyed is to cease and that the companies, like the railroads, are to be subjected to regulation.

(Newspaper.)

It seems as if not merely coarse and unlettered men . . . but that all men . . . bow the knee . . .

(Ian Maclaren.)

The commissioner was to receive twice the fee if the man were surrendered into slavery as if he were discharged.

I am going ahead and do the best I can.

(President Taft, as quoted in press dispatches.)

He insists on doing all the self-sacrifice, and have us take the ignominious part of passive recipients of his goodness. (Crothers.)

. . . interesting little fellows, full of odd, funny ways, and without being true squirrels, have most of their accomplishments.

Careful examination of the whole sentence about the "little fellows" discloses no subject for "have."

Digitized by Google

# XIII

## MISUSED PARTICLES

*Use them after your own honor and dignity*

THE "little parts" of speech are not to be despised or ill-treated. Our dealing with the small occasions of life will generally expose our dignity, or lack of it.

| | |
|---|---|
| . . . his success, again and again, seems to be certain. (Arnold.) | "Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs." |
| It is by a multitude of such considerations . . . that the framers of policy can alone divine what is practicable and therefore wise. (Lowell.) | The particle "alone" after "considerations", or the particle *only* after "is", would be in its proper place. If more emphasis is wanted, get it legitimately. |
| . . . he knew that it was of no use to try and prevent Paul from undertaking the journey. (Crawford.)[1] | This is worse than the common use of "try and" for *try to*, being *opposed* to the sense intended. |

[1] This "try and" seems to be a favorite expression of Matthew Arnold's.



Digitized by Google

| | |
|---|---|
| . . . he was not equal to imagining anything quite as bad as the words just quoted. . . . (Mary Hallock Foote.) | "The words just quoted" were insultingly, disreputably bad. This is just the place for *so* after a negative. |
| . . . and yet, as far as fiction is concerned, this method is not without its drawbacks. (Perry.) | I think the expression is demonstrative rather than comparative, and *so far as* would be right. |
| . . . sufficiently indifferent . . . as not to "compose an attitude" for our benefit. (The Point of View, in *Scribner's.*) | I suppose this use of "as" to be a mere slip. I am sorry it could pass the proof-reader. |

I have from William James's "The Will to Believe", "between believing truth or falsehood", "between an America rescued by a Washington or by a Jenkins", and "between a journey to Portland or to New York." With these compare "between connecting them with the pure or the prepositional infinitive" (Lounsbury), and "between corporate greed or corporate righteousness." (Jesse Macy.) John Fiske has "between one another"; Margaret Deland, "between every mouthful"; Thomas Hardy, "between each white lobe of honeycomb." A President's message speaks of "fraternal bonds between every section of the country." Edward Everett Hale excels, upon occasion, even in the badness

Digitized by Google

of his English. "Murray and the dictionaries", he writes, "confirm his quick guess between the relation of one of these words to the other." The "quick guess", I believe, was Lowell's. The newspaper, of course, is at least a close second: "And there is not the slightest difference between this power than the power of a court . . ." I add from Meredith, "glaring shrewdly between a mouthful", and from Paul Elmer More, "to judge honestly between the conflict of claims."

In "she took a far different course from us", we have a very simple case of confusion, and easily remedied. The preposition *from* should be used in a comparison of things that are comparable. Probably the written English of "Two Years Before the Mast" bears a strong resemblance to the spoken English of the better class of Harvard students in Dana's day. Hence, in part, its good qualities; and hence, of course, such sentences as "This was bad for our trade, for the collecting of hides is managed differently in this part from what it is in any other on the coast." If he had said *is a different business*, the sentence would have been more rational, and might have served his purpose.

The preposition *into* is ill used in "the first

Digitized by Google

appearance of the family . . . into polite society" and "placing the Commoner into the homes of their friends." William Black wrote, "George Brand found that they were almost into London"; Mrs. Phelps Ward, ". . . the great crimes into which Emanuel Bayard had arrived."

The use of *like* as a conjunction, with the sense of *as*, is a piece of illiteracy whose prevalence has induced the Standard Dictionary to set down this use as "colloquial." In the speech of an ignoramus, it would not be surprising; but Jevons, the English economist, wrote, "We have no means of defining and measuring quantities of feeling, like we can measure a mile."

We are not surprised when an illiterate person uses a superlative in comparing two persons or things. It is different when Mr. Leslie Stephen writes that "It is a blending of pride and remorse . . . and we are puzzled to say whether the pride or the remorse be the most genuine."

*Neither*, *nor*, and *or* come in for their share:

The time thought little of them, neither did Tennyson. (Stopford Brooke.)

Hardly for one moment now was she at ease with him, nor could feel the least faith or pride in his show of affection for her. (Mary Hallock Foote.)

Digitized by Google

What business it was of theirs, nor what right they claim, does not appear. (*Outlook.*)

. . . there was no cheering or any sign of public interest. (Howells.)

These sentences may not all be equally bad. No one of them, I think, is the English of good prose.

*Of* is omitted in "a couple days' march", misused in "acquainting the Philippine leaders of the disposition of the American people" (obsolete use), and in "An author of ideals" (meaning *with* ideals). It is awkwardly used, I think, in "the obtaining of special privileges", and "for the humanizing of the world." Mr. Howells has "a family of intimate friendship with the Marches."

In "justice is always and only politic", Lowell's rhetoric (or is it his indolence?) has put a strain upon his grammar. He cannot mean that justice is nothing but politic. I must think he has misused his adverb *only*, and committed a needless offence against clearness.

Mr. Arnold Bennett gives us "Less than a fortnight previously." The context might conceivably show some reason or excuse for using "previously" instead of the good word *before*. My

Digitized by Google

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA



experience of contexts, however, makes me think the chances are fifty to one that I overlooked no such reason or excuse when I made the extract.

Supposing, indeed, religions cannot be ascertained, *then*, of course, it is not only idle, but mischievous, to attempt to do so. . . . (Newman.)

If Newman had used the active infinite, *ascertain*, or *to ascertain*, the use of "so" would be justified. He has not spoken of *doing* anything, in any way. Why not, *attempt to ascertain them?* Meredith tells of "a lean Marine subaltern . . . who had come to be a major of that corps"; but he has not mentioned any corps. I quote this out of its proper place, because the fault is of the same kind as Newman's. Many other misuses of *so* will be given under Clearness.

Nevertheless, as all Christian churches do recommend the method and the secret of Jesus, though not in the right way or in the right eminency, still the world is made partially acquainted with what righteousness really is. . . . (Arnold.)

Arnold's "still" goes well enough with "though", but does not go well with "nevertheless, as."

The particle *than* suffers a good deal of hard usage. I find *different than* or *differently than*

Digitized by Google

used by Senator Hoar, by a professor of Church History, and by one of our foremost men of letters. In the *Outlook* is *prefer than*, and William T. Stead used the same. Professor Woodberry has *preferably than. Scarcely than, hardly than, opposite than, so intelligently than*, not to mention *than us* for *than we*, and *than her* for *than she*, have been treasured in my museum of "English as she is wrote."

Enough of this has nevertheless come to pass that we see something of these rare values emerging from the very jaws of the industrial monster. (Brooks.)

He was . . . preoccupied because his San Francisco offices were burning and that no further news was arriving. . . . (H. G. Wells.)

A workingman's family will make every effort and sacrifice that the brightest daughter be sent . . . through the normal school, quite as much because a teacher in the family raises the general social standing . . . as that the returns are superior to factory or even office work. (Miss Addams.)

I cannot say whether he inherited his feeling of rank from Mel, his father, or that the Countess had succeeded in instilling it. . . . (Meredith.)

The correlation of "enough" with "that" is a solecism that should be carefully avoided by a writer who is about to see "values" emerging from the jaws of a monster! In the second

Digitized by Google

sentence, one wonders whether "that" is used as a representative of "because", or is simply misused as if "preoccupied" were some word like *sorry* or *angry*. In the third, the use of "be" for *may be* seems a bit reactionary, and the comparison of "returns" with "office work" is not rational; but I have used the passage here on account of Miss Addams's second use of "that", which I take to be a Gallicism.

I note Mr. Thomas Kirkup's odd use of *till* in "It was hardly till 1848 that the working class made its entrance on the stage of history." I suppose he means hardly *earlier than* 1848.

Professor Shaler's "to this state the peoples . . . appear to have arrived", and Professor Rauschenbusch's "the attitude of primitive Christianity to the empire", might be objected to by a pestiferous purist.

For "the enduring bitterness toward England which her attitude . . . produced upon the American people" (Brooks), I see no excuse. You may make an impression "upon" the people, but international "bitterness" goes deeper.

Digitized by Google

# XIV

## MISUSED WORDS IN GENERAL

*The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies*

I SUPPOSE the old version is wrong; but a wrong translation may tell the truth, and may be no less suggestive than if it were correct. The words of the wise have point; they act as *stimuli.* They (to speak ideally) are put as with a sure hand where they belong, and driven straight home in a masterly way. They are selected according to their fitness for special uses and serve their purpose according to good structural principles. Some of us can remember that it needed sense to drive an old-fashioned "cut" nail, in the days when masterly men took pride in the work of their hands. Some of us have never "got over" the thrill that came when good workmanship delivered up to our young imaginations the secret of its beauty and dignity.



Digitized by Google

Referring to a statement quoted from a certain Professor, Newman says, "It is just so far true, as to be able to instil what is false, far as the author was from any such design." Better punctuation (deleting the first comma and changing the second to a dash) would transform this loose sentence so that it would not know itself; but the main point is that I find nothing in Murray's great dictionary to justify using the adjective "able" of *things*. "No one," says Matthew Arnold, "recognizes his [Carlyle's] genius more admirably [*sic*] than I do." The use of "aggravate" for *exasperate* and the like by A. C. Benson, Henry B. Fuller, and others may foretoken the loss of a rational and useful distinction. We who regard the origin of a word as having something to do with its proper meaning and use will not yet admit that the evil day has come. The use of *another* as if it were two separate words, as in "another, more compelling type", may be convenient, but is unnecessary and, I think, bad. From a *Chicago-Tribune* editorial I cut out the sentence, "Some day we are apt [likely] to examine an 'accident' as we ought to examine a crime." We expect such illiteracies in obscure local sheets; they should at least be excluded from the editorial

Digitized by Google

columns of a great newspaper. The distinction between *attempt* and *try* is sufficiently clear, and is useful. I think Professor Rauschenbusch disregards it in "When they speak of their nation as a virgin, as a city, as a vine, they are attempting by these figures of speech to express this organic and corporate social life."

Mr. Birrell has it that ". . . both Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Burke were of the same way of thinking." The context makes it plain that he means the two thought alike. If he meant that they agreed with *somebody else*, there might be some use for "both." *Comprise* is a good deal misused; so much that when a writer in the *Independent* says "The New York police comprise a splendid army", it is ten to one that he does not mean what he says. Somebody thinks "comprise" sounds well, and uses it with the recklessness of ignorance. Twenty somebodies (nobodies) misuse the word; perhaps one intelligent person carelessly follows suit; by-and-by its meaning is forgotten. More than once William James uses *either* in speaking of an indefinite number of things, as in "either of many ways." Will any sane person imitate this misuse because we all hold the name of William James in high esteem!

Digitized by Google

"Were Johnson to come to life again", writes Mr. Birrell, "total abstainer as he often was, he would, I expect, denounce the principle involved in 'Local Option.'" Newman, too, misuses *expect*, though not so badly. Shall we, then, make haste to join the procession? There are so many little folk on the march (toward linguistic chaos) that the name is appropriate. Admiral (then Captain) Mahan wrote of somebody's "urging the expedition of a land force." That sounds scholarly, and such use of "expedition" is not difficult to justify in pure theory; but I don't discover that the lexicographers have heard of it as a matter of actual English usage.

Will "usage" justify Professor Lounsbury's "In his devotion to what he fancied correctness he was capable . . ."? I trow not. In "I feel some explanation is due from him", a great writer does not well to omit *that;* if you and I "feel" that this verb, as used here, is greatly overworked — what is that to the feminizers of language! So Mr. Chesterton: "I feel there is something national . . . in the fact that there is no statue of Shakspere." He might have left out one more *that!* Can one *feel unconsciousness?* No more

Digitized by Google

than one can touch a vacuum. "At all events, his unconsciousness of linguistic criminality, which he seems to have felt at the beginning of his career, was shared in by no small number of his contemporaries." (Lounsbury.) The point was that he (Browning) did not "feel" anything about it.

"The two first" deserves a paragraph.

> If it ["first"] is to be considered an ordinal, no one would be likely to maintain that "the two first" is to be justified. If, however, it is to be looked upon as an adjective, Moore's explanation of its meaning and propriety is perfectly satisfactory. (Lounsbury.)

To an old user of grammars and dictionaries, the assumption that an ordinal is not an adjective is an assumption that the species does not belong to the genus which includes it. The writer seems to have in mind what have been called respectively *limiting* adjectives and *qualifying* adjectives. On the expressions (*a*) *the first two men* and (*b*) *the two first men*, I remark:

1. In "*a*" there is no contradiction of terms; in "*b*" there is at least an apparent contradiction. This comparison, *other things being equal*, is sufficient to shut "*b*" out of the competition as the less clear.

2. As to the contention that "the first two"

Digitized by Google

implies a second two following, whereas there may be only three in all, certainly in "*a*" the "two men" are regarded collectively; and certainly they, taken collectively, are first in the series, *whatever* number of other men the series may include. If there are only three in the series, yet there are three different twos, of which "*a*" clearly indicates the two that comes first.

Mr. Chesterton says on one page, "A man has not got a right"; on the next, "But a man has got the right"; and a little further on, "He is vain about the virtue he has not got; but he may be humble about the virtues that he has got." He has no mind to leave the reader in doubt as to the "usage" of Chesterton. And our Mr. Cooper:

> But whatever a writer's purpose may be, and whatever type of literature he has chosen in which to express it, he has got to do something more than idly say to himself one fine day, "I think I will write (let us say) a sonnet about a pearl or a novel about the beef trust," — and then on another fine day formulates his first line . . .

There is perhaps more excuse for this use of "got" than for Chesterton's. *Have* is quite sufficient to express possession, and expression is

Digitized by Google

weakened by adding the needless and superfluous word. For the *colloquial* use of *have got* to express necessity, unavoidableness, it may be argued that "I have to" is often used of what is customary, as in "I have to take a good deal of exercise", while "I've got to" has a sense clearly different, as in "I've got to take my exercise, else I shall have a headache." It seems likely that certain colloquial informalities will come to be used in serious writing more than they are at present; but colloquial *improprieties* should not be too readily adopted into the language of literature. The tendencies that make for questionable innovation are constant, automatic, effective; the conservatism of the careful writer is needed to keep the language pure and strong. The reader will have noticed in the quotation the (presumably) careless use of "formulates" for the infinitive *formulate;* and will perhaps have questioned the use of "express."

"Dick and Bob happened both to be home on leave", writes Mr. Howells. My dictionary gives *home* as an adverb, both of the place to which and of the place at which. Its illustration for the latter, the locative sense, is "home at last" — which might easily be explained as illustrating

Digitized by Google

the former. I do not believe that "I was home" is good English. Ruskin has "latter" (of four pictures named) for *last*. I fear that "loan" for *lend* — originally, as I fully believe, an ignorant or heedless affectation — has come to stay, in spite of the dictionaries. Even President Wilson has used it. Matthew Arnold has "look why this is so, and whether it is so without any limitations." I take it that he uses "look" for *consider*. "I am indeed to love my neighbor as myself, but this means that I am to love myself as my neighbor." (Coe.) I think not — it "means" what it says, but logically *implies* the other. In "chairs in more or less state of dilapidation" (Churchill), we have "more" used in a way that is too bad to be funny; and is "dilapidation" used in pure heedlessness, or with a fine manly contempt of "pedantry"? Very common, I believe, are expressions like "the most popular . . . of any man in California"; and I know not whether they are more needless or more irrational. Possibly Bottom's "grow to a point" will seem to posterity less funny than it has seemed to us. I read of "points . . . in which the struggle has been going on", of "the correctness or incorrectness of these disputed points", of "a point of

Digitized by Google

view" which "can never accord with the actual development of historic forces", and of one who "linked his points of view, the convictions which he regarded as axiomatic" with — I don't know what; and the old point with "position but no magnitude" has *grown* so, and the word has taken on such a wealth of meaning and relations, that I am quite upset. Without any disposition to "press the point", one might suggest that in using a word there is sometimes no harm in harking back to its proper sense.

Professor McMaster has in his History, "This article [ice], since come to be regarded as much a necessity of life as meat and bread." Very proper to avoid repeating "as"; but, omitting the *as* that belongs with "regarded", he might of course have changed the participle to *considered.* Chesterton: ". . . the result on the players would not be playful, it would be tragic." A common error, this use of "result" for *effect.* Mr. Galsworthy uses the expression "seemed recording." I miss the *to be.* The New-York *Tribune:* "Headgear which might well substitute the diadem." A palpable misuse of the verb. Mr. Howells speaks of "the respective merits of the Columannia and Norumbia", misusing "the" by not giving it a mate.

Digitized by Google

So Andrew Lang: "the Iliad or Odyssey." Miss Addams: " . . . that they both do what they want and spend their money as they please." Whatever may be true of other verbs (choose, etc.), "want" as here used requires a complementary infinitive.

In Mr. Fernald's "Helpful Hints in English" the excellent advice, "Watch that your pronoun has an antecedent to which the mind may, and must, refer it without confusion", might be better expressed — or am I behind the times? If "Watch" might properly be followed by a subjunctive (*have*), well and good; but I do not think our idiom justifies the object-clause Mr. Fernald has used. It is surprising to find in an important address by Elihu Root the phrase "way down in their hearts." That use of "way" (without even an apostrophe) for *away* is too bad; but as to the apostrophe, Mr. Root may be one of the printer's many victims. "The crowds . . . witnessed the boy in a condition such as is seldom seen" is reporters' English; but it is to be feared that "usage" will before long justify the reporter in doing his worst with the verb *witness*.

As I write and read, material constantly ac-

Digitized by Google

cumulates. If the reader has had enough of this chapter, it is easy to skip what follows.

| | |
|---|---|
| Evan displayed no such a presence. (Meredith.) | In *New* England, this would seem illiterate. |
| . . . great cutting action affected by the ocean waves. (Shaler.) | Even in a scientific book, it is well to take pains. |
| . . . a most aggravating . . . intervention. (Morse.) | Mr. Morse has this misuse more than once. |
| . . . these distinguished writers availed of the larger opportunities . . . (Alden.) | "Colloquially, in the United States." (Standard.) Mr. A. also has "availed of", passive. |
| The clangor of bells far and near calls the townsfolk to their various avocations, the toiler to his toil, the idler to his idleness, the miser to his gold. (Aldrich.) | The bell generally calls one to his main business, not to an avocation. Surely the toiler's *vocation* is to toil. To avoid alliteration, *pursuits* would have served. |
| There has always been a tendency for men to blame their yielding to evil tendencies on something for which they were not responsible. (*Independent.*) | The Standard Dictionary[1] authorizes this use of *blame* on page 203, and on page 2367 very properly condemns it as "indefensible slang." Away with it! |
| . . . the results in both cases were alike . . . (Morse.) | It sounds better in Psalm CXXXIX than in a modern book. |
| Both were agreed on what no one at that time denied, | Why not *They*, instead of "Both"? Agreement, *ex vi* |

[1] Edition of 1909.

Digitized by Google

| | |
|---|---|
| the degeneracy and depravity of the age. (Prof. Walter Raleigh.) | *termini*, cannot be rationally affirmed of *less* than two. |
| . . . to butcher and cook a buffalo that they had killed. (Roosevelt.) | Killed, then butchered, then cooked. The poor beast would certainly be dead! |
| . . . in their minds the cost may be cheap. (Newspaper.)<br>. . . said of a commodity, its price, or the place where it is bought. (Standard Dictionary, under *cheap*.) | Anything is cheap if relatively little is given for it; if "cost" is called cheap, it is so called because relatively *much* is given for it. Such use of *cheap* seems improper. |
| . . . she hoped to obtain some menial position in the household of one of her father's friends. Her cousins, at this, made a great outcry, protesting that none of their blood should so demean herself . . . (Mrs. Wharton.) | Mrs. Wharton perhaps meant to give the language of the cousins; but two well-known Massachusetts authors and a writer in the "Contributors' Club" of the Atlantic use *demean* in the same way. |
| All plain-lands of this or similar nature are due to either of two simple causes. (Shaler.) | Not "indeterminately or indifferently", but some to one, some to the other. The two causes differ widely. |

I come next to "feel ashamed", used, with "feel glad" and "feel sorry", by I know not how many. This use of "feel" for *be*, as well as for *think*, *believe*, and the like, I take the liberty to call a feminism. I don't know that I have any support in the dictionaries, but I suppose the name is quite proper in itself.

Digitized by Google

I notice the announcement of a new edition of "The Two First Centuries of Florentine Literature" by Professor Pasquale Villari (Aldrich.)

I am not acquainted with the work in question, but I trust that Professor Villari makes it plain . . . how both centuries happened to be first. (Aldrich.)

"I have only got to write." (Arnold.)

So he translates *je n'ai qu'à écrire.*

Such an attempt would be impossible. (Writer on Rhetoric.)

Yes, a figure of speech; but an unjustifiable one.

. . . qualities . . . which one would suppose impossible to unite . . . (Crawford.)

Inserting *it* after "suppose" would have made the sentence correct and rational.

. . . incapable of carrying little else besides its own rider. (*Cosmopolitan Magazine.*)

Too bad to call for remark; yet too bad to pass without notice.

. . . allowed neither their personal difference of opinion nor this abusive outcry to inveigle into his mind any prejudice against McClellan. (Morse.)

One may inveigle a person; hardly a prejudice. To inveigle is to lead astray by blinding; prejudice is blind already, by the nature of it.

Even then, and for some months later, he missed to recognize Corona's share in it. (Professor Quiller-Couch, *Oxon.*)

He uses the verb *miss* in this way more than once, *failing*, apparently, "to recognize" the difference between it and *fail.*

. . . when he reports the phenomena he reveals the law behind it. (Mabie.)

Here, too, the proof-reader may be the culprit — but strange things happen.

Digitized by Google

. . . so narrow, so prejudiced, so limited a point of view. (Wilson.)

According to mathematical prejudice, a "point" is always extremely "limited."

. . . so saturated with the point of view of a governing class. (Wilson.)

"Saturated" with a "point"! The mathematical nonentity at its *nth* power.

. . . popular with the people [*bis*]. (Mrs. Wharton.)

And with whom else, pray, could one be popular?

. . . every muscle and cord and pound of flesh that their bodies possess. (Newspaper.)

I suppose *in their bodies* would express the thought; but it would not be fine writing.

. . . [an audience] possessing, probably, a much larger proportion of men . . . (A Wellesley professor.)

The good lady is not thinking of the possessions of the audience, but of its composition.

He apparently possesses such a moral stand that he does not understand the infamous accusation he is making. (Roosevelt.)

Can this Standard-Oil man transfer his "stand", and give possession? The Colonel's comic-opera jingle recalls Pinafore.

Cardinal O'Connell speaks of the same proposition in one sentence as a "problem", and in the next as a "theorem."

It is hard to forget that a problem is something proposed to be done; a theorem, something proposed to be proved!

To many good citizens there seemed some reason to think. . . (Morse.)

*It seemed that there was* and *there seemed to be* are certainly English.

Digitized by Google

| | |
|---|---|
| . . . household wares packed in an ox team . . . (Morse.) | Nothing whatever can be packed in an ox-team. |
| . . . the whole inhabitants of a continent . . . (Jevons.) | He means not the whole ones, but "the whole on 'em." |
| . . . wrestling new problems . . . (Matthews.) | "Wrastle 'im down!" Thus extremes meet. |

Digitized by Google

## XV

### SHALL AND WILL

"Have you got over that [the *shall-and-will* difficulty] yet?"

"No," Rob said sadly, "and never will." (Barrie.)

THE point of this bit of dialogue is easily seen. After many experiments, I conclude that every one sees the point of the story about the scared Frenchman's cry, "I will drown! Nobody s'all 'elp *me!*" The main difficulty, I am sure, lies not in lack of knowledge, but in lack of the will to speak pure English. What I say applies to intelligent persons; I am not trying, directly, to reach the ignorant. Correct rules for the use of *shall* and *will* are given in many books. If in general my readers already *know* what is right, it may be sufficient to say that, in both numbers, *shall* in the first person and *will* in the second and third do not show the disposition of the (careful) speaker; while *will* in the first person and *shall*



Digitized by Google

in the second and third do show his disposition. The uses of *should* and *would* are not always so simple; but the correspondence of *should, would, would* to *shall, will, will* is generally a safe guide.

We will find a wide difference. (British Officer, in *Harper's Magazine.*)

So we in America have no monopoly of this error.

We who are unprepared to murder, cannot know when we will have to submit to some dishonorable peace. (Prof. George M. Stratton.)

We may be disposed to submit, but are not disposed to "have to" submit. Of course the professor knows English — why not use it correctly?

Will I have to pay that personal debt? (Roosevelt.)
I will simply have to grin and bear it. (Roosevelt.)

The question, Colonel, is not concerning your disposition. Your own "have to" indicates clearly a matter of necessity.

It is the sense that even if we should find another Eden, we would not be fit to enjoy it perfectly, nor stay in it forever. (Van Dyke.)

He means *we should not be fit.* He has not expressed that meaning. Nor has he made quite clear (to me) the syntax of "stay."

Were this class of writers to fail us here, we would have to regret the impairment of speech thereby produced. None the less we should have to accept it, at least for the time being. (Lounsbury.)

As I understand him, Professor Lounsbury admits that at the present time the best usage has established as correct the distinction taught in the books. Here he ignores it, and in the next sentence conforms to it.

Digitized by Google

He would have to watch Lionel dying. He would have to try to stave off Lionel's death. . . . Then he would bury Lionel. . . . After that, he would have to watch the villagers dying; and then, when quite alone, set forth.

And to what would he set forth? What had life to give him?

He felt that if Lionel were to die, he would go mad. (Masefield.)

For every "would" except the last, we may assume that there was in Roger's thought a *shall*. If Masefield is simply reporting Roger's thought, *should* is the word to represent *shall;* yet few writers would venture to use it. If he is expressing his own thought about Roger, "would" is right. In the last sentence we have formal indirect discourse. If Roger's thought was "I should go mad", *should* is right; if he used a mixed form, and thought "*shall*", still *should* is right. In either case, "would" is wrong.

The difficulty in such passages is rhetorical rather than grammatical. Here, the use of *should* throughout would violate ease. In shorter passages, the case is different. Perhaps no American writer is less afraid to say *should* than Mr. Henry B. Fuller.

Professor Lounsbury says that Browning, "in

Digitized by Google

deference to Landor", changed "I had better not" in the concluding scene of Pippa Passes to "I would better not." So much the worse for Browning. He cut out a good thing "in deference to Landor", and put in a bad thing — is it possible that he was quite awake! But I was going to quote from Professor Lounsbury something that interests me greatly:

> Furthermore, the advanced student of English stands in danger of having his principles corrupted by the example of the earlier authors with whom he makes himself familiar. In the very greatest of these, as has already been seen, the distinction [between *shall* and *will*] is not found, because it did not then exist.

Professor Lounsbury's own words, which he doubtless has in mind, are:

> Readers of our version of the Scriptures and of the plays of Shakespeare do not need to be told that it did not exist, *certainly as a binding rule*, when these works appeared.

So the point is taken out of the sentence first quoted, by the words which I have taken the liberty to italicize in the other. Elsewhere he says:

> By the middle of the seventeenth century it had imposed itself upon the cultivated speech, and, consequently, upon the literature, of England.

Digitized by Google

He goes on to quote some comments upon a line in the Comedy of Errors:

> Perchance I will be there as soon as you.

He, like the men from whom he quotes, seems to take it for granted that *will* is here used in the present-day sense of *shall;* but any one who is really familiar with the distinction now made between the two auxiliaries can easily see that the language quoted is by no means necessarily inconsistent with that distinction. In other words, if it were admitted that the distinction existed in Shakspere's time, it would be easy enough to explain this line as no exception — so easy that I would not explain, had I not an ulterior reason. "I may choose to make haste — I may choose to take my time. Perchance I shall choose to hurry; perchance I *will* hurry." As a man says, "I don't know but I *shall* be making a mistake, but I think I *will* risk it."

As to the question, now, whether or not the distinction existed in Shakspere's time: I will not quote from Abbott's "Shakespearian Grammar" — for has not our learned friend read the grammarians out of the synagogue! — nor hunt up authorities on the subject; but I will mention

Digitized by Google

a few facts. Nobody, probably, will deny that the rural New England of sixty years ago, at least that part of it which had kept a comparatively pure strain of the old "native" stock, was sound on *shall* and *will*. Those old farmers simply knew no better than to use these auxiliaries right. I have quoted (Chapter IV) a statement on this point so strong that I think it too sweeping; and from an eminently respectable source, to say the least. Now the settlement of New England by colonists from Old England began some four years after the death of Shakspere, and went on actively during a period in which many men then living could remember when Shakspere was in his prime and Elizabeth on the throne, and when Lear had not been written nor the "Accepted Version" of the Bible made. Has any scholar shown that there *subsequently* arose in rural New England a distinction between *shall* and *will* to which the early settlers had been strangers? Again, the old English Bible, in the version of 1611, is not, strictly speaking, in Elizabethan English, but largely in an earlier kind, a traditional *scripture* English, passed on to us — let us be thankful — by the wise conservatism of the old revisers;

Digitized by Google

and the *shall* and *will* of those God-fearing old farmers, be it observed, were not corrupted by their familiarity with that splendid old piece of English.

A good many years ago I made a somewhat careful examination of the play of Hamlet, with reference to the use of the four auxiliaries under consideration. I said in a paper written at that time that these auxiliaries, used as such, occurred in the play, approximately, 485 times; that they were used in the first person, singular or plural (where the real difficulty, if any, and the divergence of usage are found), about 195 times; that in all but *four* of these 195 cases the usage was in my judgment clearly consistent with the familiar rule now recognized by scholars in general. Now for the four cases:

1. In Act II, Scene 2, when Polonius says, "I will most humbly take my leave of you", Hamlet answers, "You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part withal." In Hamlet's speech *shall* might be substituted for "will"; but not, I think, without a change of meaning. "I will get along without you", says Hamlet; "I am extremely willing to be deprived of your company."

Digitized by Google

2. and 3. In Act III, Scene 1, in answer to the king's

> Good gentlemen, give him a further edge,
> And drive his purpose on to these delights,

Rosencrantz says, "We shall, my lord"; and to "Sweet Gertrude, leave us too," the queen answers, "I shall obey you." Here *will* might take the place of "shall", but it does not follow that the two are equivalent. The King's word has settled the matter. There is no call for assertion of the courtiers' disposition, or the queen's. The authority of the king and the etiquette of the court make it proper for them to efface themselves and humbly to accept the fact: "We must, and shall."

4. In Act IV, Scene 2, Hamlet says, "I will win if I can; if not, I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd hits." The second "will" might seem to be quite in the style of a New-York commuter; but perhaps Hamlet makes it a part of his consent: "I will win if I can; if not I will" take the consequences. After writing in my memorandum-book the suggestion that the second auxiliary is "attracted" to agree in form with the first, I was pleased to read in Abbott's

Digitized by Google

Grammar that "the *will* is probably used by attraction with a jesting reference to the previous *will*." As an example of the nonsense that gets into the commentaries, I note that in the valuable "Rolfe" edition of Hamlet, referring to the king's "he shall with speed to England", the editor says, "For *shall* = will, see Gr. [Abbott's] 315" — a "palpable" *miss;* for *shall* is here used precisely as we now use it, and not at all in the sense of *will.*

I wrote in another paper as follows:

> To the best of my belief, based upon a pretty careful examination of the play, there is no passage in Twelfth Night that even appears . . . to use *will* for *shall* or *would* for *should* in the first person. I have gone through Julius Cæsar and reached a like conclusion.

I had made some examination of Othello. After admitting that the examination had not been thorough, I said:

> I believe, however, that only one passage in the play calls for remark here. In Act I, Scene 1, ll. 56, 57, Iago says,
>
> It is as sure as you are Roderigo,
> Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago.
>
> The meaning of this . . . is somewhat difficult and doubtful. Rolfe makes no offer to explain it; Deighton says, "I would behave in a very different way from

Digitized by Google

that which circumstances render necessary now" — an explanation easily consistent with our rule; Hudson remarks that this is "perhaps" an instance of *would* for *should*, but . . . suggests intentional obscurity.

The papers of which I have just made use were not written for publication. I give their substance for what it may be worth. I will add that in a recent reading of As You Like It, Cymbeline, and part of Lear I have been impressed by the absence of difficulties or striking peculiarities in Shakspere's use of the auxiliaries here considered. His dramatic verse is not commonplace prose. Of course it differs as much from such prose as serious dramatic verse written in our day on themes like his would differ from it. But to one bred in the old New-England speech his use of the auxiliaries seems easy and natural. The late Dr. Hudson, an editor of Shakspere by no means to be ignored, has it repeatedly that "*could*, *should*, and *would* were often used indiscriminately in Shakespeare's time", and makes similar statements about *shall* and *will*. Observe the qualifying "often." But it is surprising how little an old (and in this matter attentive) reader of Shakspere's greatest plays has found

Digitized by Google

in them, at least in the use of the first person, to confirm or illustrate Hudson's view.

We are told that the distinction in question is slowly passing away. Whatever good thing may seem to be passing away, it is for us to resist its passage. In the Chicago *Tribune* the following paragraph is quoted from a writer in the London *Times:*

> Language is a mighty force, a turbulent stream flowing from sources beyond our control, toward an ocean of whose further shores we have no knowledge. We cannot "shut up the sea with doors, or draw out Leviathan with a hook," and it would seem as if the individual must struggle in vain against the great collective will of the community. And yet that collective will is not altogether a blind force; it follows an ideal from afar, and is ultimately governed by a confused sense or "speech-feeling" of what the language ought to be. More and more the character of this ideal, the soundness of this speech-feeling, depends upon the taste of the educated classes. If their taste be corrupted the language will suffer; while if they encourage the right fashions the set of the language will be guided in the right direction. When that is done, detailed and individual efforts will hardly be necessary, and until it is done they will be for the most part unavailing.

But "detailed and individual efforts" do influence the educated classes; and if those efforts

Digitized by Google

are made judiciously in the interest of really good English, then, to some extent at least, "the set of the language will be guided in the right direction." This or that good usage may cease to prevail, but on the whole the language will be the better for whatever well-directed effort we make to keep it good.

Digitized by Google

# XVI

## PUNCTUATION

PUNCTUATION will have to be considered under Clearness and under Ease; but because punctuation is related to correctness and rationality, a few words on the subject will not be out of place here.

The old-fashioned excessive use of commas is seen in Newman's sentence, "I only say that, prior to its being a power, it is a good; that it is, not only an instrument, but an end." The first comma seems to do no good. I know no excuse for the comma after the second "is", unless it be that the words following are in a way parenthetical. This excuse is so conventional and weak that one is ashamed to mention it; but if we take it seriously for a moment, we must see that the last "parenthetical" word is "but."

As punctuated, this passage from Meredith is hardly rational:



Digitized by Google

In this Nature is undoubtedly our guide, seeing that he who, while feasting his body allows to his soul a thought for the morrow, is in his digestion curst, and becomes a house of evil humours.

And this ( I cannot give credit):

The good judgment which leads people who have disputes, which might lead to protracted lawsuits to resort to arbitration, is especially needed in the case of labor troubles.

William James:

. . . are usually, each one of them, in love with some pet "live hypothesis" of his own.

The commas push "each one of them" aside, so to speak, and emphasize the lack of concord between the pronoun and the verb.

The printer gets a rule into his head, and defies the exceptions. So the *Atlantic* makes (?) a writer speak of " . . . the jolty, clanking, smoky, railroad yards." The three adjectives, of course, belong to "railroad yards"; and to put a comma after "smoky" is putting a comma between an adjective and its substantive. This crude error is very common. The printer, apparently, has his way in "The transport captains were civilians for the time being, under the direc-

Digitized by Google

tion of the government, and were amenable to military laws." Again, "These sentences have an analogy to such expressions as, 'c'est moi' in French and other languages."

Mr. John Graham Brooks says that "One of the most careful of our critics who studied us for three years felt this danger." This breathless sentence raises the question how many there were of the "critics who studied us for three years." "Resolved, that public drinking places, which are the haunts of vice, are dangerous and should be eliminated." The newspaper said this resolution was submitted at the brewers' convention. If so, it told more truth than the mover meant to have it tell. Mr. Birrell is clever, but this sentence from "Obiter Dicta" is not clever: "Horace used, but has long ceased to be, the poet of Parliament." The printer, perhaps, has made our gifted essayist say that Horace used the poet of Parliament, but has long ceased to be said poet.

The use of a comma between subject and predicate is painfully common. A sweeping rule against this use might now and then work hardship, especially in cases where the comma serves to prevent a serious formal ambiguity; yet if

Digitized by Google

such a rule could be enforced, it would prevent a great deal of bad form. The ever-diverting daily paper gives me, "A mere man seeking a wife among wage earners, is fortunate indeed to claim a wife in that noble profession, a nurse." One more comma, or one less; and is "nurse" in apposition with "profession"? Sir Gilbert Parker's extreme case, perhaps, is in "Why, had this lady of the Manor, come to her?"

Proper division of words at the end of the line no doubt seems to many intelligent persons a small thing — else why is it so recklessly left to the reckless printer? In high-class publications I find such divisions as *pre-sence, autho-rity, virt-ue, cult-ure, creat-ure, err-or, num-erous, problem, sob-erly*. If authors and publishers will "stand for" such things, small blame to the printer who consults his convenience or an arbitrary rule.

In the matter of compounds, we have confusion worse confounded. As to whether certain expressions shall be regarded as phrases, as hyphen-compounds, or as true compounds, there is no established usage, no accepted standard, no body of rules that is easy of application. From the nature of the case, formation of compounds and

Digitized by Google

of combinations which may or may not be treated as compounds is constantly going on, and even the best printing-houses do not seem to know what to do with them. Our forty American "immortals", or the philological societies, might be worse employed than in taking measures for the formulation of rules for compounds, neither so numerous and difficult as to be impractical nor so scanty as to be useless. If the German double hyphen (used by the Standard Dictionary) were in general use for hyphen-compounds, it would do away with the impossibility of indicating such compounds when they break at the end of the printed line.

Established and consistent usage as to placing other punctuation before or after quotation-marks is greatly to be desired. The question-mark, except when it belongs to a quoted question, is of course put after the quotation-marks; and a similar rule is followed for the mark of exclamation. With reference to the semicolon the principle is the same, and usage bids fair to become uniform in accordance with it. A beginning, at least, has been made in England of applying the same principle to the comma; and the only objection I know of — that a comma after the quota-

Digitized by Google

tion-marks "does not look right" — is not weighty. Let us hope that before long *every* mark of punctuation that does not belong to that which is quoted will be placed accordingly.

Would that authors might be made to believe that it is their duty to take cognizance of the small but not unimportant matters treated in this chapter. With them lies the remedy, if they would use it, for the abuses of punctuation. On the other hand, these things come as a matter of course under the eye and handling of proof-readers of every degree. Through them, publishers ought to see to it, even if authors do not insist upon it, that the standard be raised and something like uniform efficiency be secured. And now, speaking of proof-readers, shall I violate the unity of this chapter too flagrantly if I bring in here a few cases, outside of punctuation, in which they might have made authors their debtors? Perhaps it serves two popular novelists right to let one say "How swiftly she tread!" and the other, "He departed, ladened"; but think of the scholarly Newman in "the state in which the world has laid"! And of Mr. Fuller: "He lay these considerations before Donna Violante." A third popular novelist: "He stood

Digitized by Google

for a second, and then wearily lay him down to rest." Stopford Brooke: "The matters of which I treat of here." Somebody in the newspaper: ". . . genuine and salutatory tariff revision." Professor Katharine Lee Bates: "Howell's parlor farces." Professor Raleigh: "It was an invention on which North modelled his best writings, and, so modelling it, surpassed his teacher." Mr. Cooper, professing to quote from "the genial Autocrat" (expression not quite original), makes him speak of "a higher law in grammar not to be put down by Andrew [*sic*] and Stoddard." Woe to the proof-reader who should have let that get into the bright little Doctor's printed book! Elsewhere in Mr. Cooper's book is "Keat's" for *Keats's*. And the highly esteemed *Independent*, in its "Survey of the World": "For quite some months it made no mark"! By contrast, that makes one think of William Cullen Bryant and the *Evening Post*.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# CLEARNESS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

## XVII

### INTRODUCTORY

MEN'S hearts are better than their heads. Right feeling is more common than straight thinking. The blunders of good men may indeed be worse than bad men's crimes.

We have seen that thought and language are inseparable. If clear thinking is prerequisite to lucid expression, lucid expression in turn reacts upon thought and clarifies it. So far as our literary style is not clear, something is wrong in our mental processes. Do something for clearness, whether in thought or in the expression of thought — you will have done something for character.

Doubtless millions of the dollars that are wasted every year in litigation might be saved if men had and used the skill, first to think straight, and then, in prosaic laws and contracts and letters, to give clear expression to their thought. Quite as really, if in less evident ways, there is a higher



Digitized by Google

and finer economy in the lucid *style* for which we plead; and good style is not for the few — it is for every one of us.

Now, coming down to the business in hand, what does the principle of Clearness require? The precept that one should write not only so that he can be understood, but so that he cannot fail to be understood, is at least as old as Quintilian and the first century of our era. This is good, but it does not cover the ground. The ideally clear sentence is not only easily understood, and sure to be understood by a competent reader; further, it is so worded and arranged as to forbid even a wilful misconstruction. It will not be available for the purposes of the newspaper humorist. There may be really no room for argument as to the meaning, and yet a sentence may be faulty because its form is such that it can, as by an unscrupulous advocate, be construed in the wrong way.[1] Not only substantial clearness should be our aim, but formal clearness too, and economy of the reader's attention. Generally speaking, the subject-matter is not

[1] Of course the principles of Clearness apply to every more comprehensive unit, as well as to the sentence. It is with the latter that this unambitious work has chiefly to do.

Digitized by Google

difficult in itself; to create difficulties by misuse of language is a gratuitous offense. If in any case there is hard thinking to be done, the writer must first do it himself, and then make his language a help, not a hindrance, to the reader's doing it.

What we want, here as everywhere, is a spirit and habit of workmanship. The good workman, recognizing once for all the utility of good work, does not continually test the details of what he does by reference to utility, or stingily refuse to finish his product beyond the point at which it can be made to serve a merely utilitarian purpose. He has standards of excellence, and to these it is simply the habit of his life to conform. And conformity to these standards is to him no hardship — on the contrary, it would be hardship to be in any way compelled to disregard his standards or fall short of them. Neither does the spirit and habit of workmanship interfere with spontaneity; rather, it affords the spiritual atmosphere that is most favorable to the free and happy exercise of his powers. He is cheerfully at peace with himself.

Let me digress to say here that while, even in the most informal treatment of our subject,

Digitized by Google

it is necessary to have some plan for distribution of material and arrangement of the discussion, it is unavoidable that the parts of the discourse should overlap. Correctness not only has relations to Clearness, Ease, and Force; it derives its chief importance from those relations. Clearness is intimately related both to Ease and to Force, and these last, as we shall see later, are not easily separated from each other in a practical study of the subject. Much of the material already used, therefore, might have been reserved for one or another of the topics yet to be considered, and much that is yet to be used will have been distributed for convenience rather than according to any rigid classification.

Digitized by Google

# XVIII

## PUNCTUATION AND CLEARNESS

PICKING up an excellent systematic text-book on Rhetoric, I find that Punctuation is not even mentioned in the index. Another, more elementary, teaches that the chief use of punctuation is to make the meaning plain, but seems to make no mention of it in the formal discussion of Clearness. Being content with an elementary and informal method, I begin with punctuation as a requisite, humble and simple but indispensable, for the construction of clearly written sentences. In modern use, it is *a part of the writing*.

It is not easy, and fortunately it is not necessary, to draw the line between formal ambiguity and real obscurity. In some cases classification depends upon the personal equation of the classifier. In each of my first group of quotations there is at least some lack of formal clearness.



Digitized by Google

Estates inherited through three generations are rare in the United States, particularly great estates brought together by very rich men. (Charles W. Eliot.)

No doubt the ambiguity here is purely formal; yet a semicolon after "States" and a comma after "particularly" would make the sentence better.

. . . the sons of the warriors rushed into the monasteries and bowed side by side with the sons of churl and serf, not only before the altar but over the furrow. (Prof. Vida Scudder.)

But there were no furrows in the monasteries! There are easy ways out of such confusion. Put a comma after "monasteries", deleting the comma after "serf", or sparing it, "according to taste."

At the time that Painter's book was published, the romantic drama in England was not born, nothing but heavy imitations of Seneca and Plautus had been acted, and the *Pallace of Pleasure* [Painter's book] had to wait twenty years for the first of the playwrights who rifled it. (Raleigh.)

The expression "At . . . published" stands to modify too many clauses. The book couldn't "wait twenty years" *at the time of publication.* A semicolon, or division of the sentence into two, might have made better work. Of the emphatic modifier that modifies too much, we shall have to speak further.

It was the week after the Easter holidays, and he was journeying along with Smart the mare and the light spring cart, watching the damp slopes of the hillsides . . . (Hardy.)

The words *along with* are so commonly used as a prepositional phrase that if "along" is to be taken separately as a modifier of "journeying", it should be followed by a comma.

. . . the observations and inferences of many men clubbed together into a common fund. (Coe.)

It seems more natural to think of men than of things as clubbed together. Comma after "men."

Digitized by Google

Byron's tales which naturally follow are more full of adventure and passion . . . (Woodberry.) [He has been speaking of Scott's "tales in verse."]

Doubtless the relative clause is not restrictive; but the lack of punctuation makes the sentence read as if it were. Two commas are needed.

It is not alone the murdered Italians in New Orleans and the confessed helplessness of the government to enforce justice or the reverberations from California over the Japancse in public schools . . . (Brooks.)

This breathless sentence makes "reverberations" seem like a second object of "enforce." Perhaps there was a reason for using the long word; I believe there was none for neglecting to punctuate.

If the reader thinks that in some of the following extracts the ambiguity is merely formal, very possibly he is right.

. . . the surface of the natural wall, broken only here and there by a projecting ledge, . . . (Crawford.)

The context shows that the construction is nominative absolute. The punctuation denies this.

At that period, when thoughts of invasion had formerly stirred up the military fire of us Islanders . . . (Meredith.)

I judge that "At that period" does not refer to a time already indicated. If not, the comma obscures the meaning.

But a study of Poe's analysis of *The Raven* — quite aside from the question whether he actually wrote the poem, as he says

I suppose nobody doubts that Poe wrote the poem; but the text implies a doubt. Omit the first comma, possibly inserted by a composi-

Digitized by Google

he did, or merely succeeded in making himself think he did so . . . (Cooper.)

tor wise above what was written, and the nonsense becomes sense.

The cheery little chipmunk, so common about Brown's Flat, is common here also, and perhaps other species. (Muir.)

Chipmunks are a genus. "Other species" of Chipmunks? The first comma is misleading, I think, and the second useless.

. . . for others, the danger of coming to want is so great, the deadly habit of endless hoarding for the future is formed . . . (Muir.)

This makes "for others" depend on "is formed." I think the meaning would be shown if the commas were deleted and *that* inserted after "great."

This memorial, it is proposed, to have take shape in a training college. . . . (Newspaper.)

Delete the commas, which are for the moment utterly misleading. Such punctuation is hardly civil.

Common people are better booted and better gloved in America than in any European country I know, in spite of the higher price for clothing here, the men wear ready-made suits, it is true, to a much greater extent, but they are newer and brighter than the London clerk's carefully brushed, tailor-made garments. (Wells, Tauchnitz Edition.)

This reads exactly like the letter of an uncultivated woman. A semicolon after "here" would improve the sentence greatly, and do away with the squint. This squint is more than merely formal, and is annoying, to say the least, to the reader who takes himself and his author seriously. But why should there not be two sentences?

All through the ever-increasing movement of life that was shaping itself; (Pater.)

Pater's "that" is demonstrative. Elsewhere, he squanders commas; why omit one after "life"?

Digitized by Google

The very book out of which they feed their private devotion and that entire religion out of which Christianity grew, took shape through a divine inspiration which found its highest and fittest organs in a series of political and social preachers. (Rauschenbusch.)

The absence of a comma after "devotion" makes "religion" stand as second object of "feed." Insert that comma, and the comma after "grew" is no longer offensive (between subject and predicate), but helps to make the sentence easy, clear, and effective.

. . . Saskatchewan and Alberta each sent almost unanimous Liberal contingents to Ottawa with great majorities. The Provincial elections . . . have lately been held when the Conservative party only escaped annihilation. (Newspaper.)

Did "each" send more than one contingent? Were the "majorities" sent with the "contingents"? Is the last clause really temporal? Two commas would help the sentences, but not make them good.

The broad shallow streams these meadows belong to are mostly derived from banks of snow and because the soil is well drained in some places, while in others the dam rocks are packed close and caulked with bits of wood and leaves, making boggy patches; the vegetation, of course, is correspondingly varied. (Muir.)

This sentence is not only breathless, but hardly intelligible as it stands. Perhaps a semicolon after "snow" and a comma after "patches" would make it say what the writer meant. One gets a little out of patience when so able a writer lets his work go before the public in such shape.

He saw the evil in the life of men and their sufferings, but he approached these facts purely from the moral point of view. (Rauschenbusch.)

A comma after "men" would give a plain sense. An *in* after "and" would give a plain sense. I am not quite sure of the meaning.

Digitized by Google

No intelligent writer, with a proper sense of what is due to himself and to his readers, can without blame neglect the subject of punctuation. Because the writer knows better and cares more than anybody else about the thought he wishes to convey, he cannot safely leave punctuation to the publishing-office, however excellent and well-equipped that may be.

Digitized by Google

# XIX

## FORMAL CLEARNESS (I)

*Oh, reform it altogether!*

WHY not "reform it altogether" — this practice of writing obscurely or ambiguously! Hamlet, whatever else he had or lacked, certainly had brains. It is plain that as a dramatic critic he expressed the views and spirit of Shakspere himself; and, evidently enough, when Shakspere really took the trouble to be critical he had small patience with weak-kneed compromise. "Abstain from every form of evil", says the Revised Version. Doubtless this is correct; but "Abstain from all appearance of evil" is good advice, even if the apostle Paul did not say it. I believe that in writing it is well to abstain from all, even the most superficial and purely formal, appearance of ambiguity. If this is a counsel of perfection, so much the better. If English is to be written nobly rather than commercially



Digitized by Google

and cynically, writers must have ideals and stand by them.

What Newman said of the writers of his time, as compared with greater writers of an earlier time, might with some truth be said of twentieth-century authors, compared with Newman himself. He is likely to be remembered when these clever ones are forgotten; but I am embarrassed with an accumulation of transcripts from his pages — and few pages at that. Here are some of them:

It is impossible, gentlemen, to doubt that a future is in store for Ireland, for more reasons than can here be enumerated.

The form of the sentence indicates one meaning; the probability is in favor of another. The sentence lacks both clearness and force.

Bacon was too intellectually great to hate or to contemn the Catholic faith; and he deserves by his writings to be called the most orthodox of Protestant philosophers.

Does "too" modify "intellectually", or "intellectually great"? Formal clearness and, I think, ease would have been served by writing *too great intellectually* or *intellectually too great.*

The Rationalist makes himself his own centre, not his Maker; he does not go to God but he implies that God must come to him.

The ambiguity is purely formal, but it is a blemish. It would be very easy to make the first statement formally clear.

. . . he knows when to be serious and when to

Why not avoid formal ambiguity and gain ease by

Digitized by Google

trifle, and he has a sure tact which enables him to trifle with gracefulness and be serious with effect.

saying *gracefully* instead of "with gracefulness"? That word *gracefulness* is a good word to avoid.

"And one might even replevin earlier examples from earlier authors of earlier languages — from Aristophanes, for instance." This might appeal to the legal mind. But how shall we construe the first "from"? And why should so clever a student of English as Professor Brander Matthews use the ambiguous phrase "authors of earlier languages"? William James and Professor Coe are at one in ". . . to whom the world is far more like a steady den [*sic*] of fear than a continual fountain of delight", and ". . . the whole of work will be transformed into something more like play than a contest for food." They would perhaps have thought it pedantry to repeat the preposition "like."

Three bits from Mr. John Graham Brooks:

Nor can it be allowed to pass that this glorifying is in no way exclusive of the West.

The context shows that he cannot mean what he says.

Critics have said that democracy was conceived of by de Tocqueville as a fatality; that it was bearing down upon us with forces so irresistible . . .

The second substantive clause, which ought to represent a second affirmation of the critics, is apparently intended to set forth De Tocqueville's conception.

Digitized by Google

| | |
|---|---|
| About every phase of our life and institutions, this is what the outside observer may do for us. | The preposition "about" is ill chosen; the more, as it might be taken at first glance for an adverb. |

Miss Addams has, "This movement must tend to decide upon social matters from the social standpoint. Until then . . ." Until when? No time has been mentioned. Moreover no one "movement" has been mentioned in the near context. Also, " . . . to attain to any mental or moral integrity for ourselves, or any such hope for society." Does she mean *mental* or *moral* hope?

Dr. Van Dyke, whose reputation is so assured that possibly he can afford to be careless, says that " . . . nothing could be more unlike . . . Longfellow than to put his feet in the wrong place, either on the table, or in his verse." I am sure that if Longfellow put his feet on the table he put them in the right place on the table. I am sorry I cannot give due credit for "His reform of the schools is admirable . . . [sentence of thirty-four words]. General Wood has increased the salaries of the teachers, and provided for the teaching of the English language therein." *Utinam "in" doctoribus lingua Anglica doceatur!*

Digitized by Google

"Milk is a perfect food for the young of its kind", says a popular writer who in more senses than one writes "illy." "The members of the House . . . were seated . . . the gentlemen present were standing." These words of an eminent historian were not intended, I think, for a sly joke.

A United States Commissioner of Education wrote: "These doctors find it difficult to earn their daily bread at times." The President of Yale (whose English seems to me generally admirable in its straightforward business-like simplicity) says that "Upon them rests the responsibility . . . for the maintenance . . . of athletic purity and fairness in the dealings of each university with its rivals." "Athletic purity" is indeed better than the feeble kind. Professor A. S. Hill quotes George P. Marsh as saying of the possessive of English nouns: "And, of course, we generally limit the application of this form to words which indicate objects capable of possessing or enjoying the right of property, in a word, to persons, or at least animated and conscious creatures . . ." — *to* WORDS, *in a word, to* PERSONS. Colonel Roosevelt writes of some one who "fell in love with the woman he soon afterwards married during the siege." In one of Mr.

Digitized by Google

Churchill's novels: "'You must eat enough, Lige,' she said. He was finished in an incredibly short time." What finished him? Mr. Muir, "It screams something like a crow." He doubtless means *somewhat*.

"For instance," writes Professor Rauschenbusch, "the position of woman has been elevated through the influence of Christianity, but by its indirect and diffused influences rather than by any direct championship of the organized Church." Just such a formal ambiguity as the Latin genitive would give us; but ambiguity is a serious weakness in the Latin language, and English has weaknesses enough of its own. Easy to say *on the part* "of the organized Church." Elsewhere he says, "No man is a follower of Jesus in the full sense who has not through him entered into *the same life with God*. But on the other hand no man *shares his life with God* whose religion does not flow out, naturally and without effort, into all relations of his life, and reconstructs everything that it touches." I have italicized part of the quotation. The italicized expressions are so far ambiguous that I could not be sure of their meaning without the context. The finite verb "reconstructs" should of course be an

Digitized by Google

infinitive, coördinate with "flow." I am quoting not from a first impression, but from the ninth reprint.

An Englishman, writing in *Harper's Weekly:* "The signal-staff enjoy no sinecure, and even when idly in harbor fluttering bunting and flickering semaphores indicated that the Admiral was circulating orders." The abridged clause is neatly adapted to mislead the reader into taking "fluttering" as transitive; "idly" should for clearness have something expressed with which to construe it; a comma after "harbor" would have been of use. The sentence is exasperatingly journalistic. In ". . . he has freedom for it only in the weary evening hours after work is done, on Sundays and holidays", Professor Vida Scudder has nodded, perhaps literally. One way to make the sentence presentable would be to put an *or* before "on Sundays." "It is safe to say", writes Professor Lounsbury, ". . . that there is not a classic author in our speech who has not employed it, and in many instances employed it frequently." I think it "safe to say" that he does not mean that every "classic author in our speech" has "in many instances employed" the usage in question "frequently." He means, rather, that

Digitized by Google

they have all employed it, and many of them have employed it frequently. Of course this view squarely conflicts with the professor's statement; but the usage of good authors, which he holds so dear, by no means justifies one in assuming, against the evidence, that they mean just what they say.

"B. L. T." of the Chicago *Tribune*, whose good-humored satire is quietly and constantly helping the cause of good English, said that "As a candidate Gov. Wilson's strength reached its highest point the day after the Baltimore convention." No one questions the correctness of the sentence, *As a candidate Governor Wilson was strong*. Here *As a candidate* is a modifier of the predicate, *as* approaching a prepositional use (Standard Dictionary), and *candidate* and the subject of the sentence refer to the same person. The usage is quite intelligible and established. In the sentence quoted above, we are expected to identify "candidate" not with the subject, but with a genitive dependent on the subject. Grammatical relations apparently alike should express like relations of thought.

It may be affirmed that "As a candidate" depends on the genitive "Gov. Wilson's", —

Digitized by Google

the subject being equivalent to *The strength of Gov.-Wilson-as-a-candidate.* Such a relation would do very well in a highly inflected language, in which we should have the genitive of the word for *candidate* (Latin, *candidati*) agreeing in form with the other substantive. But English is the opposite of a highly inflected language. A different argument would be that we all make, very properly, statements like *Governor Wilson's strength as a candidate reached its highest point,* and therefore need not stick at the transfer of the phrase *as a candidate.* The answer is that *Governor Wilson's strength as a candidate* is either grammatical or idiomatic, while the locution in question is neither.

Further illustrations may enrich this chapter for some readers.

| | |
|---|---|
| . . . would not have divided their forces, with one army occupying General McClellan, while they attempted the capital he had left uncovered with the other. (Lowell.) | A real and obvious fault here, and one that might easily have been remedied by transposing a phrase: . . . *while with the other they attempted the capital he had left uncovered.* |
| We have to build everything in this world of domestic joy and professional success, everything of a useful, | One reads "this world of domestic joy", perhaps with no suspicion that his phrasing is wrong. He will soon |

Digitized by Google

| | |
|---|---|
| honorable career, on bodily wholesomeness and vitality. (Eliot.) | be undeceived, but why should he have been misled at the beginning? |
| He knew more of prophets and apostles than modern doctors of divinity. (Allen.) | *Of* omitted before "modern" — repetition avoided. Does he always sacrifice so much for ease? |
| He easily reached the conclusion that men live to be old because they do not sleep late, instead of perceiving that men do not sleep late because they are old. (Aldrich.) | A peculiar case of squint. Positives instead of negatives — *e.g., rise early* for "do not sleep late" — would have made the sentence formally clear. Here, again, the *spoken* English would be clear. |
| It was, of course, possible for him to receive only well-based or well-worded compliments. (Higginson.) | *He might . . . receive* would convey the meaning, without suggesting that he could receive no others. |
| Let no nation think itself safe in being merely right, unless its captains are inspired and sustained by a sense thereof. (Lowell.) | The "archaic" word "thereof" should mean *of being merely right.* Moreover being personally right may not be Lowell's meaning. |
| Will the realistic or romantic type of fiction be best fitted to the needs of the coming democracy? (Perry.) | The contrasted types are *the realistic* and *the romantic.* He might have said *realistic, or romantic fiction.* |
| There is beauty, too, of the Oriental and Western kind, and plenty of it. (Crawford.) | If he means two kinds of beauty, not one composite, why not *both Oriental and Western?* |

Undoubtedly, ambiguity that is purely formal is not the worst of faults. When anything desir-

Digitized by Google

able is to be gained by it, or anything undesirable (work always excepted) is to be avoided, then is the time to weigh reasons. If anything may be added to the gayety of nations by the clever use of it, well and good. But I wish to record my sober and deliberate conviction that without good reason, lack of clearness in form should never be tolerated.

Digitized by Google

## XX

### FORMAL CLEARNESS (II): *ONLY*

In most cases no serious doubt as to the meaning arises from the position of the adverb *only;* hence this word comes under Formal Clearness. The following illustrations are drawn from many respectable British and American authors, more than half of whom are writers of high rank. Names are omitted, that each passage may be considered on its merits. With the same end in view I neither quote nor propound, at this point, any theory as to reasons for keeping the adverb out of its logical place. The second of the parallel columns shows the passages rewritten, with *only* put next to that with which it is supposed to belong in thought.

| | |
|---|---|
| She could only reach his depths by reminding him of some things he had put himself out of the way of thinking on. | She could reach his depths only by reminding him of some things he had put himself out of the way of thinking on. |



Digitized by Google

It can only be changed by the same power which made it.

It can be changed only by the same power which made it.

If a thing only exists in order to be graceful, do it gracefully or do not do it.

If a thing exists only in order to be graceful, do it gracefully or do not do it.

Why take something which was only meant to be respectful and preserve it disrespectfully?

Why take something which was meant only to be respectful and preserve it disrespectfully?

. . . the beasts that perish are more hygienic than man, and man is only above them because he is more conventional.

. . . the beasts that perish are more hygienic than man, and man is above them only because he is more conventional.

. . . he was only saved from rough handling by the interposition of the vicar.

. . . he was saved from rough handling only by the interposition of the vicar.

His cheery courtesy was only disturbed when he became conscious . . .

His cheery courtesy was disturbed only when he became conscious . . .

. . . that mysterious something only found in those who have been mayors.

. . . that mysterious something found only in those who have been mayors.

Yet it has only been by a great effort of will that I have been able . . .

Yet it has been only by a great effort of will that I have been able . . .

Most families lived only in one room.

Most families lived in only one room.

Digitized by Google

The boy knows that his kite will only rise when the wind blows hard against it.

The boy knows that his kite will rise only when the wind blows hard against it.

The fulness of the calamity can only be seen when its consequences are considered.

The fulness of the calamity can be seen only when its consequences are considered.

The large jet-black ants are only ticklish and troublesome when one is lying down under the trees.

The large jet-black ants are ticklish and troublesome only when one is lying down under the trees.

. . . I said that the sea could only be painted by more or less dexterous conventionalisms . . .

. . . I said that the sea could be painted only by more or less dexterous conventionalisms . . .

. . . we can only say that the choice is right, when we feel that the means are effective . . .

. . . we can say that the choice is right, only when we feel that the means are effective . . .

The thought of Ottalie gave him a fine sense, only properly enjoyed in youth, of his own superiority to the world.

The thought of Ottalie gave him a fine sense, properly enjoyed only in youth, of his own superiority to the world.

*Will*, in the first person, denotes intention, and you can only know your own intentions.

*Will*, in the first person, denotes intention, and you can know only your own intentions.

Coming to consciousness of yourself can only bring to light weakness in case the weakness already exists in you.

Coming to consciousness of yourself can bring to light weakness only in case the weakness already exists in you.

Digitized by Google

There are those, again, who are good enough to grant that the Catholic Church fostered knowledge and science up to the days of Galileo, and that she has only retrograded for the last several centuries.

Viewed in itself . . . that principle is simply, undeniably true; and it is only sophistical when it is carried out in practical matters at all.

. . . if they could only open their mouths on their own special subject . . .

. . . enemies of our creed have allowed that he [Shakspere] is only not a Catholic, because, and as far as, his times forbade it.

. . . would only be practically true of a community . . .

He could only help society to continue doing right by himself doing what society considered wrong.

There are those, again, who are good enough to grant that the Catholic Church fostered knowledge and science up to the days of Galileo, and that she has retrograded only for the last several centuries.

Viewed in itself . . . that principle is simply, undeniably true; and it is sophistical only when it is carried out in practical matters at all.

. . . if they could open their mouths only on their own special subject . . .

. . . enemies of our creed have allowed that he [Shakspere] is not a Catholic, only because, and as far as, his times forbade it.

. . . would be practically true only of a community . . .

He could help society to continue doing right only by himself doing what society considered wrong.

A text-book says that "The rule . . . that *only* should immediately precede the word it modifies is not observed strictly by the best

Digitized by Google

speakers and writers, the position being determined by considerations of rhythm as well as by considerations of clearness." I have gone somewhat rapidly over these twenty-four quotations, and find that, according to my judgment, in nineteen cases the correct form has either a better prose rhythm than the original or an equally good one, while in five the original has the better. On the other hand, in a large majority of cases the original gives somewhat more prominence to the *only*. These results, so far as they have any weight, go to confirm my previous impression, that "considerations of rhythm" are not generally decisive, but the writer, having the *only* uppermost in his mind, by a perhaps quite unconscious choice puts it "at the head of the procession."

Here is what seems to me to be the truth about this word *only:* To place it where on general principles it belongs, one must be much more careful than the ordinary speaker or writer. Carelessness about *only* is so far the rule that (*a*) it has become a kind of unconscious convention, and (*b*) to take pains with the word seems to most persons (or would if they thought anything about it) rather artificial and stiff; very much

Digitized by Google

as common proprieties of civil speech will seem to an untrained country boy like affectations. The exceptions, I think, are negligible; *only* is misplaced (just as in England, we are told, "aren't" is much used for *am not*, and as in New England "ain't" is used for *am not*, *aren't*, and *isn't*) because people are not sufficiently civilized to use words correctly.

I need not take space to show how in sentences like some that I have given *only* may by easy rearrangement be rendered emphatic without ambiguity; how good rhythm may be produced without sacrifice of correctness; how the most ardent stylist may make bad rhythm and ambiguity together.[1] Artistry costs effort.

[1] It will perhaps be suggestive to print two of the passages (both from Ruskin) with certain divisions indicated:

. . . I | said that the sea could | only be painted by | more or less dexterous | con | ventionalisms . . .

. . . we can on | ly say | that the choice | is right | when we feel | that the means | are effect | ive.

This is not prose poetry; it is (for prose) bad rhythm.

Digitized by Google

# XXI

## THE SQUINTING CONSTRUCTION

We have seen that it is not easy to distinguish sharply between formal ambiguity and that which is more than formal. In further treatment of the subject of Clearness, I shall not make the distinction prominent. If I give the words that head the chapter a wide application, I shall not, I trust, go beyond a fair use of them.

Professor Lounsbury says that "the separation of the adverb from the verb seems to many to deprive expression in some measure of strength." The expression "of strength", depending really on "deprive", squints at "measure." The proof-reader may have served Mr. Masefield an ill turn in "The voice reveals character more clearly than the face, more clearly than it reveals character, it reveals spiritual power." A semicolon after "face" would prevent even a momentary uncertainty as to which way the next six words



Digitized by Google

look. Which way does "more or less" look, in " . . . a commonwealth of the chief actors and actresses, who govern themselves more or less under the control of a director appointed by the government" (Matthews)? "In *Measure for Measure*, in contrast with the flawless execution of *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakspeare has spent his art in just enough modification of the scheme of the older play to make it exponent of this purpose . . ." (Pater.) Which way does "in contrast" look? It were better to write so that one need not concern himself about discourse once correctly printed, any more than the Cumæan Sibyl heeded the fate of the leaves in her cave.

"True, on the whole, to fact, it is another side of kingship which he has made prominent in his English histories." Here again Pater fails. Like a participle seeking where to attach itself, his "True" looks this way and that. "I will now proceed", says Newman, "to describe the dangers I speak of more distinctly . . ." Mrs. Humphry Ward is the schoolgirl in "Dora tried to explain what she meant to herself, and failed." Mr. G. K. Chesterton has the squint: "For, mean and gross as they are, in all serious-

Digitized by Google

ness, they contain what is entirely absent from all Utopias . . . of our time." "We have reason to believe that, in the meantime, he did as much writing as they would take for the booksellers" and ". . . studying the things he was not sent to study with even too intent application . . ." are quoted from one Woodrow Wilson.

The next is intrinsically more interesting. "But in one peculiar case", says a contributor to the *Independent*, "the hue of the odor was seen by the person who experienced it on his own forehead." To experience on one's own forehead the hue of an odor as well as see the hue — one would like to try it! And this is sufficiently complicated: "It was only when a preacher spoke before kings and gentry like Latimer, or before the citizens of free cities like Savonarola . . . that social or political preaching could be attempted . . ." (Rauschenbusch.) What a word our "like" must be for a foreigner to get acquainted with! And as if its numerous correct uses were not enough, we are told that the use of it as a conjunction ("He acted like you do") is common in Great Britain, and is defended by some good authorities! The authority who could defend that as good English might qualify as

Digitized by Google

*advocatus diaboli* (though I believe the function of the *a. d.* is not defense), and be done with it. Mr. Woodberry's standing is so high that some readers may think this is right because he wrote it: ". . . the novel entered upon its career of recreating the past with extraordinary vigor . . ." If the reader smells a fault in my own language just now used, I beg to inform him that I knew what I was doing. Interpret either way. When I write seriously, I will try to write clearly.

Having occasion to look up a passage I had quoted from William James's "The Will to Believe", I took time to re-read a few pages of the book. On page 6 I found, "You probably feel that when religious faith expresses itself thus, in the language of the gaming-table, it is put to its last trumps." A very good illustration of the "squint." On page 7, ". . . as if the incorruptibly truthful intellect ought positively to prefer bitterness and unacceptableness to the heart in its cup." In the immediate context James quotes from Huxley a passage containing a good specimen of the squint; and from "that delicious *enfant terrible* Clifford", the following: "Belief is desecrated when given to unproved and unquestioned statements for the solace and

Digitized by Google

private pleasure of the believer." From page 9 I copied these two fragments: ". . . a previous action of our willing nature of an antagonistic kind." "Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth . . ." Four pages, half-a-dozen squinting constructions.

Again the parallel columns; let us hear from other authors, of no mean rank.

| | |
|---|---|
| He . . . is liable, in our judgment, to very grave reprehension if he appeal to the body of the people against those who are more immediately its representatives than himself in any case of doubtful expediency. . . . (Lowell.) | An examination of the whole sentence makes it clear that in more than one way it might easily be rewritten so as to express the thought neatly and forcibly, and at the same time without any violation of formal clearness. |
| . . . their conveying him and his baggage to and from the station by the same cab, and their separation of him and his baggage by means of the local transfer agencies. . . . (Harper's Easy Chair.) | A weighty matter like the transportation of a British tourist and his "boxes" should be discussed in impeccable English. We want to know, you know, what the lit'ry feller means! |
| . . . each drop freezing on whatsoever it fell . . . (Allen.) | What is "whatsoever it fell" supposed to mean! |
| As she closed the blinds, for the first time in her life, the Professor's daughter did . . . stoop to take a look at | A professor's daughter "hadn't oughter" stoop to do such a thing — or allow any unseemly squinting in |

Digitized by Google

the window of a student. (Mrs. Phelps Ward.)

her English. "We know what belongs to a" professor's daughter!

. . . their writing had the effect of reported speech addressed to an audience. (Miss Scudder.)

Now what does this mean! To address a "reported speech" to an audience were perilous plagiarism.

. . . they would not wield the *brutum fulmen* of a name merely signifying phenomenal success for advertising purposes. (Alden.)

Consider how many times Mr. Alden must have knitted his care-worn brow over such English, written by would-be contributors.

For myself, having drawn the picture of the man as I see him, though knowing well that I am far from seeing him all, and still farther from seeing inwardly through him, yet I know that I cannot help it by additional comments. (Morse.)

It is necessary to read at least two-thirds of this sentence of forty-three words before one can be sure about the syntax of the fourteenth word, "though." An old reader may be pardoned for doubting whether this writer was clear in his own thinking.

Henceforth . . . I will speak of events which happened from an historical point of view. (Crawford.)

The fault is formal; but Mr. Crawford is elever enough to attain, in elementary matters, perfect form.

In later life he preached the duty of walking with admirable perseverance to his friends. (Stephen.)

I can imagine Mr. Crawford's comment on this; for time was, I believe, when Crawford was critical.

Digitized by Google

# XXII

## THE AUTOMATIC SENTENCE

THE Average Writer, one is tempted to say, assumes that with a fair start his sentence will go alone. Now and again we see it start with a negative subject or its equivalent, and trot on merrily with ill-matched predicates.[1] (1) The popular novelist writes that "Neither Hatch nor Egeria questioned him, but . . . waited silently." (2) One of our forty Immortals affirms that ". . . no man can follow their trails . . . and cannot make out an object twenty yards ahead." His second predicate, going as it pleases, says the opposite of what he means. (3) Professor Coe gives his second predicate a new subject, but lets it go wrong: "Of course, few preachers have the hardihood to be perfectly true to the dogmatic point of view. They are too close to the heart of Jesus to apply in actual practice

[1] Compare Chapter XI.



Digitized by Google

such a legalistic scheme . . ." *Few preachers*, then, are too close. The easy way is not always the best way, whether in religion or in literature.

(4) "If this were not done, if things went on at the rate they had been going, nobody would be read with pleasure much longer than a few years, and in course of time could hardly be understood without an interpreter." Professor Lounsbury seems to be giving us Swift's views, as expressed in his Letter to the Earl of Oxford. One might question whether "nobody . . . could hardly be understood" exhibits Swift's English or Lounsbury's; but (5) on another page I find a sentence which certainly is the English of the Yale professor: "They attribute to the body created by Richelieu benefits which no institution of the sort ever had the ability to confer upon a language and never can have." (6) Here belongs a sentence of Miss Sarah Orne Jewett's: "She would rarely speak of anything more than a minute or two, and then would drift into an entirely foreign subject." In the second predicate the reference is not, I take it, to the rare occasion.

At least half of the six sentences thus far quoted are plausible enough on a rapid reading. It would

Digitized by Google

not be very surprising if half the readers of these pages should pronounce three or four of them good English. Such a judgment is entitled to consideration.

To begin with, is there any real need of these questionable locutions? In an off-hand way, without having the contexts before me, I will so far rewrite the sentences as wholly or in part to avoid what I object to; and the reader may judge for himself.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Neither Hatch nor Egeria questioned him — they waited silently. | Approximately correct; and therefore better than the original. |
| 2. No man can follow their trails, and it is impossible to make out. | This is at least tolerable, and therefore better than the other. |
| 3. Few preachers have the hardihood. Almost all are too close.<br>In few cases do preachers have the hardihood. They are too close. | I am willing to leave my suggestion without any comment.<br>This form leaves the second sentence unchanged, and the two consistent. |
| 4. Nobody would be read more than a few years, and in course of time one could hardly be understood. | Another sentence made consistent with itself. I have inserted one little word to remedy the principal fault. |
| 5. . . . benefits which no institution ever had the ability to confer, or ever can have. | The double negative has been avoided, with no loss, I think, in force or ease. |

Digitized by Google

| | |
|---|---|
| 6. She would rarely speak of anything more than a minute or two; presently she would drift.<br>She would rarely speak of anything more than a minute or two; presently drifting. | Of the two changes suggested, the first is in the direction of conversational ease; the second makes a briefer expression, but more formal. Both, I think, make for clearness. |

One reader, responsive to the merest hint, sees the point and is ready to pass on; another, lacking initiative and the trick of generalization, may prefer to have his thinking done for him; another likes detail, reiteration, wealth of illustration; another is curious about the style of this author and that. Before leaving the topic I have broached, it may be well to give further illustrations. No one is obliged to read them.

| | |
|---|---|
| . . . the compact . . . that . . . none of them should . . . treat its ordinary self too seriously, or attempt to impose it on others; but should let these others . . . have their fling. (Arnold.) | In *they should be modest for themselves, but should insist upon the rights of others*, two *shoulds* have one subject, making sense. Arnold's "none" stands as subject of two *shoulds*, making rank nonsense. |
| . . . no citizen can admit this, but must say . . . (Morse.) | This sentence is perfectly analogous to Arnold's, above. |
| . . . in many cases no child is really able to maintain the father's establish- | The sentence could be made correct and clear by inserting *each* before "hav- |

Digitized by Google

| | |
|---|---|
| ment, having received only a fraction of the father's capital. (Eliot.) | ing", thus changing the irrational construction to a safe nominative absolute. |
| The history of no civil war can be written without bias, scarcely without passionate prejudice. (Lowell.) | Suppress the words "without bias", and the sentence shows its real deformity, which is quite needless. |
| The dignity of his thought owes nothing to any ceremonial garb of words, but to the manly movement that comes from settled purpose and an energy of reason that knows not what rhetoric means. (Lowell.) | If to a thought so fine Lincoln had given a "garb of words" so ill-made, he might be forgiven; but Lowell was "a gentleman born", "a fellow of infinite" leisure for the mastery of expression. |

Lowell's own words insist upon being recalled:

> . . . ef your soul
> Don't sneak thru shun-pikes so's to save the toll.

It is better to follow the broad highway of lawful English than to take illicit short cuts "so's to save" the price, in patient labor, that one must pay who would write worthily.

The following is part of a story which Miss Jewett quotes in "Deephaven": "'He moved down to Denby, and while he was getting under way, he left his family up to the old place, and at the time I speak of, was going to move 'em down in about a fortnight.'" The words are

Digitized by Google

quoted from "Captain Sands." I am sure that most men of the Captain Sands type would *speak* that sentence somewhat as follows: "He moved down to Denby, and while he was getting under way he left his family up to the old place; and at the time I speak of, he was going to move 'em down in about a fortnight." In the revised version the emphatic modifier, "while he was getting under way", modifies only the first of the following predicates. Mrs. Humphry Ward: "For a few sous he bought a bunch of yellow-eyed narcissus and stepped gaily home with them." "For a few sous," then, "he . . . stepped gaily home." Notwithstanding the distinction of Mrs. Ward's work, it sometimes lacks finish. On the same page of my note-book with the above sentence I find "aggravating peculiarities", "strongest results", and *only* four times misplaced, all recorded against her. From the New-York *World:* "At the age of twenty he went out to Australia and staid there forty-five years." Perennial youth! Mr. Howells might have given us one little pronoun in "Near at hand the river was busy with every kind of craft, and in the distance was mysterious with silvery vapors"; then he would not have said that "near at

Digitized by Google

hand the river" "was mysterious" "in the distance."

E. F. of C., while riding in his automobile . . . yesterday, had a paralytic stroke and died this morning at 4 o'clock. (Newspaper.)

Sometimes these communications would fill a column, and were almost always well worth a careful perusal. (McMaster.)

By the help of a small bucket and our hats, we bailed her out, got on board, hoisted the boats, eat our supper, changed our clothes, . . . and, having taken a night-smoke, turned in. (Dana.)

During that night the storm increased in violence, nor abated with the light of day.
(Mary Hallock Foote.)

. . . when I was called and found it an ugly, gusty morning I went gratefully back to bed, and spent the rest of the day fishing. (Benson.)

At the foot of a steep precipice was the whirlpool from which Parpon had saved the father from an awful death, and had received this lovely region as his reward.
(Parker.)

In that duel Prince Rudolf received a severe wound, and recovering therefrom, was adroitly smuggled off by the Ruritanian ambassador, who had found him a pretty handful. (Anthony Hope Hawkins.)

By adroit manœuvres Polk had forced the fight upon a weak and reluctant nation, and had made to his own people false statements . . . (Morse.)

Digitized by Google

At the death of Edwin Booth, poor Yorick passed out of my personal cognizance, and now lingers an incongruous shadow amid the memory of the precious things I lost then. (Aldrich.)

In every one of the above cases, it would be easy to secure formal clearness without serious detriment to the style. If one of these writers intended an emphatic modifier to apply to two or more predicates, he would think we ought to take it accordingly; why should not a different intention be indicated by a different form of expression?

Digitized by Google

# XXIII

## THE CRAZY SENTENCE

ILLOGICAL locutions may be idiomatic — they may be idiotic; they are often so inconsistent with the normal working of a sound mind as to justify the strong language which heads this chapter.

The following sentence is taken from a somewhat ambitious work on English Grammar:

> The name of each specific inflection, as *person*, *case*, *mood*, etc., has had a somewhat indeterminate value in grammatical usage, and has been variously defined as a *form*, *property*, *distinction*, *condition*, etc.

It would seem that *person*, and the rest, are *properties* of certain parts of speech, and that different persons, cases, etc., are indicated sometimes by certain variations of form called *inflections*. I do not see what is gained by identifying a *property* with that which *indicates* or *distinguishes* the property. A red coat, to be sure,



Digitized by Google

used to indicate that the wearer was a British soldier, and some rhetorical advantage might be gained by calling "Tommy Atkins" a red-coat; but in the technical language of the sciences, which are difficult enough at the best, it would be well to call things by their right names. While I am unable to decide whether at the outset the intention is to have the italicized words refer to "name", or to "inflection", it is clear that what is called "*person*", for instance, is here identified with what is called an "inflection." But now comes the main point: If the "name" has been "defined as a *form*", then, according to the definition, the name *is* a form — *i.e.*, the name *possessive*, applied to a certain form of the personal pronoun, *is* that form! So then the name of a boy is the boy; and now that the cost of living is so high, it would be a great saving to "keep" the name, and let the boy go. Seriously, the thing itself has been defined "as" *form* (or whatever), and the "name" has been defined *by* one of the terms mentioned.

It is a common mistake so to frame a sentence as to identify one thing with another which cannot possibly be the same. Mr. John Graham Brooks says that "Not a few of these latter-day

Digitized by Google

writers are so slovenly and inaccurate that they serve admirably as books of humor." Slovenliness and inaccuracy are not in themselves humorous — the humor of this passage is in the unconscious way in which he makes his sentence illustrate his proposition. In "He had caught the trick of telling a story which apparently was due to supernatural causes . . . ", Mr. Cooper identifies a "story" with some event or events narrated in it. John Henry Newman troubles me as King Charles troubled Mr. Dick. I can't keep him out. "I suppose the *primâ-facie* view which the public at large would take of a University . . . is nothing more or less than a place for acquiring a great deal of knowledge on a great many subjects." So a "view" is "a place for acquiring . . . knowledge"! Mr. Chesterton says that ". . . there is at Oxford so hot and keen a struggle, consisting of coal-heavers, London clerks, gypsies, navvies . . . that . . . aristocratic exclusiveness gives way." But it will be better to resort to the parallel columns.

*Human* is that which belongs to man as man; *humane* means "compassionate." (A. S. Hill.)

I see no reason why the difference between adjective and substantive should be disregarded.

Digitized by Google

"The Chicago Symphony Orchestra" is a change of name necessitated by circumstances, but it is permissible to speak of it as the Thomas Orchestra; or, as we usually say, "the orchestra." (B. L. Taylor.)

Mr. Taylor's own comments on this would be interesting. The expression is quoted as a name, is affirmed to be "a change of name", and is referred to by the pronoun "it" as an organization.

This moral theory, while it does undoubtedly explain a few isolated instances of material want, and is a contributory factor in many more . . . (J. H. Holmes.)

The gentleman can hardly mean what he says. Moral delinquency, rather than this "moral theory", is no doubt "a contributory factor" in producing poverty.

. . . Phœbus was nothing but a bombastic way of saying the sun . . . (Santayana.)

Phœbus was a god in the Greek mythology. "Phœbus" or *Phœbus* was a name.

As a mere proletary, his ignorance is a temptation to the stronger race . . . (Lowell.)

This should identify "proletary" with "ignorance." For discussion of such a sentence, see Chapter XIX.

He came seldom to London, and then only as a task. . . . (Stevenson.)

And this form ought in some sense to identify "task" with the subject, "He."

In the more barbarous parts of history, such as the East of Europe . . . (Woodberry.)

The East of Europe is not even a part of geography. This is not civilized English.

Darwin himself was careful to point out that other factors, such as the La-

The Lamarckian theory, propounded after the middle of the eighteenth century,

Digitized by Google

| | |
|---|---|
| marckian theory of inheritance of acquired characteristics, no doubt had a vital part in the process. | was too late to have a part, of any kind, in the æonian process of the Descent of Man. |
| . . . Caleb stood on the ladder completely equipped, except for his copper helmet, the last thing done to a diver before he sinks under water. (Hopkinson Smith.) | If a copper helmet is the last thing done to a diver, then good-by to distinctions (and to distinction) in the use of language. |
| . . . it ["this glue of compromise"] will not stand hot water, — and as the question of slavery is sure to plunge all who approach it, even with the best intentions, into that fatal element . . . (Lowell.) | That is the very note of the untrained boy. He wants to say "that fatal element", so he says it, without stopping to inquire whether or not "hot water" can properly be spoken of as an element. |
| But although in discussing the word 'chance', I may at moments have seemed to be arguing for its real existence, I have not meant to do so yet. (James.) | After considering the context, I seek an antecedent for "its" within the sentence. If for "its real existence" we put *the real existence of the word chance*, the nonsense is manifest. |

My belated efforts to learn something of psychology from the books have been uniformly ineffectual. One of my latest ventures in this field confronted me with the statement that "science is a systematic study of facts." The dictionary seemed to warrant me in questioning

Digitized by Google

this statement. A few pages further on, I read that "science studies these phenomena." So a study of facts studies facts. On another page the author speaks of breaking up a verb-form "into stem . . . mood, tense, personal ending", etc.; but I had never supposed it was possible to break up a verb-form into "mood" (I use this spelling under protest) or tense. You break a thing up into its components, not into the abstract properties it may have. Reading on, I found that "blue" is called an "experience." I do not see how a clear understanding of facts should be promoted by giving the same name to an experience of the subject and a quality by common consent spoken of as belonging to the object. Later, I was told that "the interval is . . . an experience." I suppose this is figurative language; in pure science, I could wish that a spade might be called a spade.

In another place the learned writer says, "I am conscious . . . that Bacon did not really write the Tempest." This expands — no, upsets — my notion of consciousness. For aught we really *know*, Bacon may have written that immortal comedy. It follows that one may be conscious of something that is not "so."

Digitized by Google

"What, now, is this intimate consciousness of self which underlies and includes, though it does not consist in, the moment-by-moment ideas and experiences? What, in other words, do I mean by the 'I', which is conscious and has experiences?" The second question, as introduced, should differ only in form, not in substance, from the first. If the two are substantially the same, it seems to follow that the self and a state or activity of the self are one and the same. What is the vibratory condition of the G-string of a violin? In other words, what do I mean by the G-string of a violin? "*Consciousness*", says the dictionary, "is used in many wide and loose senses." I think it be so.

Digitized by Google

# XXIV

## MORE INSANITY

*I fear I am not in my perfect mind.*

LEAR suspected his condition — crazy writers suppose themselves sane. This chapter is expected to have (if anybody reads it) a cumulative effect. If any reader likes the chaotic style, the aid and comfort which he may have found in chapter XXIII will be enhanced by the eminent and numerous examples of confusion displayed in chapter XXIV. On the other hand, if the reader "views with alarm" the prevalence of printed unreason as indicated hitherto, the formidable array of irrationality yet to be exhibited should harrow up his soul.

. . . speedy second thought convinces the American that this is not a thing which he has ever desired under the existing system, and which it is not at all likely that he would desire under one to come.

(Gilman.)



Digitized by Google

I do not think it is a good book, and certainly not worth publishing on its merits. (Benson.)

— without the air of having picked the single instance, but of having chosen from many — (Churchill.)

Each village was defended by a palisaded fort . . . and was occasionally itself surrounded by a high wooden stockade. (Roosevelt.)

Every traveler who passes through the South sees the conditions existing, and frequently returns to write books about them. (Booker T. Washington.)

The Colonel no doubt means that occasionally a village was defended by a stockade in addition to the fort — not that each village kept building stockades and tearing them down. Mr. Washington's language indicates a greater output of books on "the conditions existing" than he meant that it should. And one wonders *whither* the traveler returns.

Something was missing in each of these, and I have supplied it in brackets:

1. He is not anxious to keep any more of the Spanish territory than he can[not] help. (*Independent.*)

2. . . . little can they tell to those who have not themselves seen similar wildness, and like a language have [not] learned it. (Muir.)

Digitized by Google

3. [Instead of] *For the future* it had become fashionable to say *in future.* (Lounsbury.)

4. The Assyrian sculptures contain more representations of caparisoned horses than even [of] men. (Newspaper.)

5. . . . the use that the Flying Squadron might have been [of]. (Mahan.)

6. The other conception of theology regards God not so much as an arbitrary authority outside the world as [as] the spirit of love and sacrifice within it. (College president.)

Of course, inserting what is necessary to make sense is one thing, and making the sentence a good one is quite another. Numbers "1.", "5.", and "6." need to be rewritten. Number "2." would have been better without the second "have." Lest any reader question the sense of "6." as amended, I suggest supplying before the bracketed *as* the omitted words *it regards him.* This done, the third *as* is perfectly justified.

I am sorry I cannot be sure which one of our best weeklies had a contributed article ending with the words, ". . . it will undoubtedly supply the need for just such a discussion as Christian Socialists and others have long felt." If contributors write such stuff, and editors cause it to be printed, readers ought to protest. We may

Digitized by Google

be sure that when the public do their part in the way of criticism, editors and publishers will take notice. Here as elsewhere, the demand for a good thing will be met by an effort to supply it.

Sometimes, instead of omitting words necessary to the sense, writers put in more than the sense will bear:

| | |
|---|---|
| To say this is not to deny that one or another of these artificial tongues may not serve certain of the humbler purposes of commerce, and that some men may use it in bargaining, even if they do not feel it fit for love-making. (Matthews.) | The redundant negative seems to be an echo of a French idiom. If it were right in the first subordinate clause, it would be right in the second, where it does not appear. Mr. Howells, too, has the "idiom." I note the feminine "feel it fit." |
| . . . that it had cost him on an average of $800 per game . . . (Newspaper.) | This error is much too common. Either "on" or "of" should be omitted. |
| . . . minds as different as those of Charles Darwin and of T. H. Green. (Drummond.) | How many minds had Charles Darwin, and how many had T. H. Green? |
| We are never more likely than to-day to be in a better position to inflict condign punishment upon France with slighter loss to ourselves. | I am very sorry that I cannot give due credit for this achievement. How fine a scorn it shows for the trammels of intelligible speech! |
| When a thing of the intellect is settled it is not dead: | I suppose "the critter means" (as Hosea Biglow |

Digitized by Google

rather it is immortal. The multiplication table is immortal, and so is the fame of Shakspere. But the fame of Zola is not dead or not immortal; it is at its crisis; it is in the balance; and may be found wanting. (Chesterton.)

would say) that the fame of Zola is an unsettled "thing of the intellect"; that it is not dead, nor (yet proved to be) immortal. But perhaps, like Mr. F.'s aunt, Chesterton hates a fool. Perhaps he would punish us for our natural gifts.

The following expressions are the work (?) of writers who should know better:

There is a rich class and a poor class, whose manner of life is wedged farther and farther apart . . .

The subject shifts from *any one may* to *it may.*

No man . . . can be blind for years to the idolatry that a love-crazed woman is perpetually trying to conceal for him.

Lord Tennyson was even harder to induce to go into an anthology than Mr. Browning, much less to take an interest in the making of one.

The State would be a democratic State, elected by universal suffrage.

. . . seems to have been master of the whole range of economic literature, and wielded it with a logical skill not less masterly.

The distinguished author of a text-book on Rhetoric says, "A figure of speech is an expression in which one thing is said in the form of another related to it." After mentioning that

Digitized by Google

the distinction between figurative and literal expression is "precisely stated in the definition", he goes on, "If . . . we . . . say, 'He fought like a lion', the expression is figurative; for we express the exact fact in a form 'related to it.'" According to the definition, one *thing* is said in the form of another *thing* related to it — *thing* is related to *thing;* while according to the illustration, "form" is related to "exact fact" — *form* is related to *thing.* It is true, and intelligible, that a figure of speech is the employment of words in a non-literal or unusual way, with a view to rhetorical effect. The illustrative sentence, "He fought like a lion", has the disadvantage that it may be quite literally true. Putting aside the baldest technicality — "a simile is an express comparison" — the statement is figurative, if at all, only so far as it stirs the imagination with the thought of that fierce and formidable beast. "The lion of the tribe of Juda" is a pure figure and a perfect illustration.

In the same volume in which Stevenson tells of the infinite pains he took to learn to write, I find this sentence:

> Perhaps Robert's originally tender heart was what made the difference; or, perhaps, his solitary and

Digitized by Google

pleasant labor among fruits and flowers had taught him a more sunshiny creed than those whose work is among the tares of fallen humanity. . . .

If "him" and "those" were datives in *form*, or were governed each by a preposition *to*, we should have the plain sense that Robert's labor had perhaps taught him a more sunshiny creed than it had taught the other fellows; but this is not at all what R. L. S. means. A reckless journalist might write thus; the wonder is that a real workman in words should be so heedless.

I group here a few extracts which for the most part need not be remarked upon:

. . . it makes a distinction between the value of family life for one set of people as over against another. (Miss Addams.)

The Honourable Dave was unmarried; and, he told Honora, not likely to become so. (Churchill.)

A renewal of hostilities is in no quarter considered probable or hardly possible. (*Outlook.*)

To conduct such a journal as to make it of real value would be expensive. . . . (*Independent.*)

In conclusion, to summarize most briefly what has been said, the prime consideration in the whole field of literary appreciation is to avoid making literary study a study of something else. (Woodberry.)

Digitized by Google

The issue between the dogmatic and the non-dogmatic views of religion is nowhere else as decisive as it is with respect to the place of Christ in the Christian life. (Coe.)

Would Mr. Woodberry advise a young writer to violate formal clearness as he violates it? While I know what a scholar should mean by the language Professor Coe has used, I don't know whether he is thinking of dogmatic "views" and non-dogmatic "views", or of the dogmatic and the non-dogmatic *view*. Perhaps I ought to apologize for the doubt. No apology is due for mentioning the harsh sibilancy of the latter part of the sentence.

The errors that I put next are sufficiently commonplace; but they are significant:

. . . there would be statues of each of these persons at the end of each of these streets. [Shakspere Street, Cromwell Street, and Wordsworth Street.] (Chesterton.)

At least two statues of each worthy at the end of each street. Eighteen statues as a minimum. Municipal encouragement of art. What Chesterton *means* — that is another matter.

His gloom over the slavery question was because . . . (Brooks.)

Does this "was" mean *existed?* If not, the conjunction is misused.

His feet are like great pads and his track has little

Then "animals that climb and dig" have a "sharp artic-

Digitized by Google

of the sharp, articulated expression of Reynard's, or of animals that climb and dig. (Burroughs.)

It is from this impatience of the tragic and the bombastic that it is now . . . opposing itself to the unchristian practice of duelling . . . and certainly it seems likely to effect what religion has aimed at abolishing in vain. (Newman.)

There is no reason why the data . . . should be sufficient . . . and to expect that they will is like expecting that one witness in a trial is to prove the whole case, and that his testimony actually contradicts it, unless it does. (Newman.)

The positive forms of each [the adverb *rathe* and the adjective *rath(e)* ] practically died out long ago. (Lounsbury.)

. . . seconded by an energetic friend, we [the "friend" and the writer] thought to bring Slide to terms. (Burroughs.)

ulated expression." If Mr. B. doesn't mean to have us infer that, he should give his thought better "expression."

Religion has aimed at abolishing dueling (but not at abolishing it "in vain"). So "it seems likely to effect" dueling. Such utter nonsense from the pen of the youngest reporter would justify a severe "calling-down" from his chief.

"I expect that is so" and "I expect he did" are not only common but vulgar. Newman's "is to prove" is bad enough, but may be thought of as equivalent to a future; his "contradicts" is inexcusable. His "unless it does" is hardly clear.

Probably the professor does not mean that the adverb had more than one positive form. Compare Chesterton's language, above.

This is freedom of speech, with a vengeance. But there is no bondage in willing attention to rudimentary good form.

Three more, and this chapter ends:

All clambakes at the point were invariably Indian fashion, rocks heated by a great cordwood fire in the

Digitized by Google

open air and then buried deep under rockweed, to be later eaten, juicy, tender and irresistible. For this men and women came from all over America.

(Newspaper.)

The president's tariff board is composed of able and well-informed men in a general way. I know that my friend Hon. William Howard is.

At least, it [destructive criticism] provokes the silent question, "What are you going to do about it?" and, finding no answer, turns from the speaker [*sic*] as from one in whom is no help. (*Churchman.*)

Digitized by Google

# XXV

## IT

"SHE" served as title for a book that was widely read; surely "It" is big enough to head a chapter. I have used in another connection some material bearing on the misuse of this troublesome midget, and some such material has gone into the waste-basket; but the tiny pronoun is so great a sinner against Clearness as to deserve to be faithfully punished here.

> The Englishman who has money expects to find his inferiors cringing to him; and in his own country his expectation is rarely disappointed. When he happens to come over here, he fails to find it, and he misses it. (Matthews.)

We have seen in Chapter XII that a form like "cringing" may be either a participle or a gerund. In the sentence, *On account of his inferiors cringing to him so constantly, he comes to expect it*, the form *cringing* being a gerund, the combina-



Digitized by Google

tion *inferiors cringing* is a substantive, and therefore is properly regarded as antecedent of the pronoun *it*. But in the sentence I have quoted from Professor Matthews, "cringing" is a participle, and his pronoun "it" has no proper antecedent.

> . . . since *q* is employed only with *u* (when it is pronounced *kw*) . . . (Matthews.)

Here if the pronoun "it" refers to "*q*", the statement in curves is not true; for *q* certainly is not "pronounced *kw*", nor pronounced with the sound of *kw*. If the *it* does not refer to "*q*", it does not refer grammatically to anything.

> To make the matter perfectly clear, it may be worth while to consider in detail one of the many disputed usages about which very positive pronouncements are constantly made by men who have not taken the pains to acquire the slightest familiarity with its history. (Lounsbury.)

It is a pity that he did not make his sentence "perfectly clear." A comma after "usages" would have suggested that "which" relates to "one", and so would have prepared the reader for "its"; but, taking the sentence as it stands printed in the book, until "its" is reached in

Digitized by Google

the reading there is good reason to believe that the relative relates to "usages." Then it appears that if the sentence is grammatical, "one" is the antecedent. I am not at all sure that the sentence is grammatical.

In general, however, it may be said that a pronoun may fill any noun relation when it can be done without ambiguity, or violation of any other principle of good rhetorical style. . (Mary H. Leonard.)

So far as use of pronouns is in question, the writer of this sentence would probably think it good enough as it stands; and any one else has a perfect right to think so. But I suppose the mere question of a formal antecedent for the second "it" is not all that should be considered. With the temporal clause preceding the subject and modifying the whole proposition, the "it" might loosely refer to the whole thought of *a pronoun filling a noun relation.* That clause being incorporated with the predicate, the loose reference would naturally be to *filling a noun relation;* but so referring, the pronoun would not fully express the meaning intended. If *do so* were substituted for "be done", the difficulty would disappear. The worst fault of the sentence — or at least the most obvious one — is

Digitized by Google

in that the use of "other principle" makes "ambiguity" to be a "principle of good rhetorical style." I take it that *without ambiguity, or any other violation of rhetorical principles* would express the thought.

This whole question of clearness has been so admirably discussed by Anthony Trollope in his *Autobiography* that I cannot do a greater service to young writers than by quoting it in its entirety.
(Cooper.)

Then, instead of quoting Trollope's Autobiography entire, he quotes thirty-four lines. If "*Autobiography*" is not the antecedent of "it", perhaps "question" is! I suppose Mr. Cooper thinks of the detail of sentence-making somewhat as a great architect might think of a journeyman-carpenter's work. But there is a difference. An architect, writing for the instruction of young architects, does not have to fit floor-boards or put up door-casings. An author, writing for the instruction of young writers, is obliged to do — before their eyes, so to speak — a great deal of the work of a "journeyman"; and on their way of doing just such work will depend, very largely, the success as well as the merit of their literary product. *Longum iter est*

Digitized by Google

*per praecepta, breve et efficax per exempla.*[1] The tyro may or may not act upon Mr. Cooper's good advice; he will surely be influenced by the gentleman's bad example.

> Clearness is so inseparable an element of all good writing that many a critic and rhetorician has regarded it as a term almost synonymous with that illusive quality called style. (Cooper.)

"Clearness" evidently is regarded at the outset as a quality. Then the pronoun "it", which refers to "Clearness" and should mean the same that "Clearness" means, is made to mean a "term"; but this "term", again, Mr. Cooper tells us has been regarded as "synonymous" not with another term, but with a "quality."

> Johnson's claim to be the best of our talkers cannot, on our present materials, be contested. For the most part, we have only talk about other talkers. Johnson's is matter of record. Carlyle no doubt was a great talker — no man talked against talk or broke silence to praise it more eloquently than he, but unfortunately none of it is in evidence. (Birrell.)

Mr. Birrell seems to mean that for the most part we have only talk about other talkers, with

[1] Misquoted (into bad Latin) by Lowell in the Biglow Papers, First Series, No. III.

Digitized by Google

little quotation from them, but Johnson's talk is recorded. Pity that he had not given his meaning expression. The comparison is between other talkers' talk and Johnson's talk. As other talkers' talk has not been mentioned, there is no justification for saying "Johnson's." The last "it" in the passage has no antecedent; for evidently it refers to Carlyle's talk, and not to the "talk" he "talked against."

If the endowed journal did not in due time secure a wide circle of readers it would indicate that it was not succeeding in what it aimed to do. (*Independent.*)

Here we have the pronouns set thick. Do they all refer to "journal"? I suppose the first refers to *the fact.*

The last one [gaseous element] announced before xenon was Prof. Brush's claim for etherion, which has not, however, been isolated, and perhaps cannot be. It awaits confirmation. (*Independent.*)

Yes, very likely the writer's "It" refers to "claim"; but "claim" was a *gaseous element,* and so it is a gaseous element (etherion), after all, that "awaits confirmation."

The trees of the fields and plantations writhed like miserable men as the air wound its way swiftly amongst

Digitized by Google

them: the lowest portions of their trunks, that had hardly ever been known to move, were visibly rocked by the fiercer gusts, distressing the mind by its painful unwontedness, as when a strong man is seen to shed tears. (Hardy.)

This piece of imaginative description ought to have a fair chance to quicken the imagination of the reader. As good style in general is a transparent medium through which the reader comes straight to the thought, so good sentence-structure allows and aids the mind of the reader to commune undistracted with the writer's mind. If the subject of the participle "distressing" were so worded as somehow to express that which caused the distress, the pronoun "its" would be justified. No doubt it costs more work to express what one means than clumsily to suggest it — hence the "appalling increase every day in slipshod writing." See Chapter I.

He may do wrong, but he does not set out to do so, and he does not choose to continue in it. (Coe.)

This little sentence might puzzle a foreigner learning English. The verb *do* is used four times, and in two ways — correctly, of course, although not very "elegantly." Is "wrong" an adverb, or a noun? If it is an adverb, does

Digitized by Google

"so" correspond to "wrong", or is "do so" used in the sense of *take such a course?* If "wrong" is an adverb, moreover, there is no formal antecedent for "it", and we have the meaning suggested but not expressed; for to the English ear "do wrong" does not mean the same as *doing wrong*. If "wrong" be a noun, then the word can be regarded as antecedent of "it." I believe that in this sentence "wrong", though it be close to the border line, is not a noun but an adverb; and that "it", standing in the writer's mind for the notion of *doing wrong*, is not properly used.

At this point I chance to pick up a copy of the *North American Review*. An anonymous book-notice begins,

> One necessarily feels distrustful twinges in reading a book of criticism so hastily written that it falls short of being grammatical.

That I might have written myself. Quoting from the book the sentence, "He was to recall how often he had chanted or shouted or otherwise declaimed Hugo's Gastibelza on horseback", the writer says,

> There is nothing but the small "h" for horseback to save one from fancying the poem entitled "Gastibelza on Horseback."

Digitized by Google

That has an encouragingly familiar sound; but:

On the other hand, Mr. Thomas seems to have read his poet punctiliously and patiently . . . from end to end. It is not his fault if he did not and could not mark its rare and, in many directions, unexcelled beauties.

Perhaps his own phrase "from end to end" led the reviewer astray. At any rate, after so promising a start, he has given me one more example, a melancholy one, of the misuse of *It.*

Light literature could hardly be expected from a magazine conducted by either Mr. Cave or Dr. Johnson; indeed, it is only within our own memory that the antiquarian features of this periodical were set aside; but it was lighter than could be found in any other miscellany of the time, and within its first years it had a score of imitators. (Alden.)

I am unable to think Mr. Alden means that "this periodical" was "lighter than could be found in any other miscellany of the time." On the other hand, the second *it* cannot properly refer to "Light literature"; and if we refer it to the notion of *the literature in the magazine,* we have to think either that the following pronouns refer to this literature, or that, referring to the periodical, they are used in a most indefensible way.

Digitized by Google

## XXVI

### OTHER PRONOUNS

On page 202 of Pater's "Appreciations" I find a sentence beginning "His eloquence." It soon appears that the eloquence is that of King Richard II. But between this sentence and "Richard is the most sweet-tongued of them all" (p. 201) there have intervened two or three sentences, containing, by my count, one hundred and fifty-seven words; and in these sentences I find no word that can possibly serve as antecedent for "His." Pater's excellent criticism of Shakspere would be better if he condescended to write, as Shakspere himself wrote, in a lucid way. Yes, Shakspere's lines were written for the theatre, where they had to be understood at once or not at all, and Pater's essays, no doubt, were written for the leisurely reader; but does Shakspere's work *read* any the worse for its lucidity? No clear writing is the worse for its clearness.



Digitized by Google

On page 78 of "Mere Literature" (Wilson) a sentence begins with "His father", meaning the father of Walter Bagehot. Three sentences follow, each beginning with "He", and referring to the father. Then comes one beginning "His mother", and telling of Walter Bagehot's mother. Yes, it is possible to understand; but even the appearance of confusion is to be avoided. Most readers do not take in a whole page at a glance. In the following passage from Mr. Gilder, one form or another of the pronoun *he* is used eight times, sometimes referring to Mr. Cleveland, sometimes to Mr. Carlisle. Finally, for no very apparent reason, the pronoun is dropped, and "Carlisle" takes its place. Bringing in the name at the beginning of the third sentence would have made the remaining sentences clear in form. Here is the passage:

In speaking of Mr. Carlisle he said he was perfectly sure of his disinterestedness. His very latest speech, that of the 24th of April, he considered a new proof of this. He might have said to himself that the whirligig of time, that brings such strange things around, might bring something to him. Nevertheless, he was perfectly outspoken and frank. Carlisle might have said, "There is no necessity for me to add to my sound-money record."

Digitized by Google

I will now group some passages:

His [Balzac's] erratic and laboured methods of revision, as recorded by Théophile Gautier in his *Portraits Contemporains*, are such an interesting object lesson of the extent to which the fever for revision may be carried that it seems worth while to quote him here rather extensively. (Cooper.)

Mr. Cooper's last pronoun ought to refer to Balzac, but does refer to Gautier. Elsewhere in his book Cooper quotes, presumably with approval, Prof. Barrett Wendell's statement: "Clearness I may define as the distinguishing quality of a style that cannot be misunderstood."

Such study belongs to the enthusiast perhaps, to the reader who finds in literature the greater part of his mental life; in general he must content himself with something far short of this. . . . (Woodberry.)

Of course the pronoun "he" should refer to "enthusiast." I judge from the whole context that it does in fact refer to the general reader, as distinguished from the enthusiast. There should be no question.

Until he heard those grave notes he had not seen much of Ottalie in her, except in the way in which she sat, the head a little drooped, the hands composed, in a pose which no art could quite describe, it was so like her. (Masefield.)

The last clause seems to be used to give a reason why "no art could quite describe" the "pose"; but it is not too easy to see that the reason is a good one. Does "her", at the end, refer to Ottalie, or to the other woman? The question condemns the sentence.

He said to an intimate friend that the boy evidently was going to be like him; because untruthfulness seemed to be no tempta-

He paid a high compliment to the boy, and to one other. Was that other the speaker, or the "intimate friend"? Here the English language,

Digitized by Google

tion whatever to either of them. (Gilder.)

. . . he will never carry the philosophic yoke upon his shoulders, and when tired of the gray monotony of her problems . . . will always escape gleefully. (James.)

If he and his friends like to drop into a saloon after midnight, or even want to hear a little music while they drink together early in the evening, he is breaking the law while he indulges in either of them. . . . (Miss Addams.)

He dies, and his equals debate who is to be his successor: while the rest of them who have come in contact with him, very probably hear nothing of his great launch and final adieu till the final winding up of cash-accounts. . . . (Meredith.)

No one will understand rightly anything in European politics unless they start from the fact that Russia . . . (Stead.)

And the reason for this, of course, is that there is unaided, is hopelessly ambiguous.

I have diligently considered the context, and can find no antecedent for "her." The reference is doubtless to the problems of philosophy; but the pronoun is ill-used.

No antecedent for "them." The writer seems to have been thinking of *dropping* into a saloon, and of *hearing* a little music. The English language being what it is, "to drop" and "to hear" cannot properly serve as antecedents for "them."

I have studied, but cannot make out that "them" refers to any persons who have been mentioned. It seems to be equivalent (in Meredith's intention) to *those;* which is English, and would of course have made the sentence clear.

Mr. Stead's "they" cannot grammatically refer to "one." It is not easy to believe that it refers to "politics."

Put *it* in place of "there", or *in being* in place of "to

Digitized by Google

nothing especially discreditable to the average man or woman to be unable to draw a pig with their eyes blindfolded. . . . (Cooper.)

. . . and it is instructive to compare them either with the lifeless works of the Dutch themselves, or with any modern imitations of them, as for instance with the seas of Calcott, where all the light is white and all the shadows grey, where no distinction is made between water and foam, or between real and reflective shadow, and which are generally without evidence of the artists having ever seen the sea. (Ruskin.)

. . . Pater wrote . . . the little essay on "Romanticism", which re-appeared in 1889 as the postscript to *Appreciations*, which may be shortly discussed here. (Benson.)

For example, we are fully justified in pitying any individual or any people who fails to see the fun. . . . (Matthews.)

be." The eyes of man, woman, or pig are not properly called "their" eyes. The pig and the pronoun could be spared.

The longer a sentence, the more need of clearness. Do the relative adverb "where" and the pronoun "which" relate to "works" and "imitations", or to "seas"? According to the text from which I copy, the reference is to more than one artist; but Ruskin may have written *artist's*. A slight change in the wording would have left the sentence less at the printer's mercy. Note the coupling of "which" with "where."

The second relative might relate to any one of three nouns. It does relate to "essay", awkwardly jumping the first relative clause. And why "shortly" for *briefly*?

Considered as the work of a freshman, this would be conspicuously bad. Yet it is the work of a veteran professor.

The demonstrative words *such* and *so*, and even the adjective *other* ("this, that, and the

Digitized by Google

other") being in a way near kin to pronouns, will not be out of place here.

It ended only in the recommendation to "smash" the trusts. Such legislation was enacted. (J. R. Commons.)

The legislation was "such" as *what?* The use of language is to express thought, not merely suggest it.

Has he no existence, no purpose in life, outside of that perpetual gentleman in waiting? If so, Honora has never considered it. (Churchill.)

"If so" — that is, properly speaking, *if he has no existence*, etc. But this I believe to be the opposite of what is meant.

. . . education that is unorganized, or only partly so, in libraries and the daily or other periodical literature. (T. C. Hall.)

The compound "unorganized" cannot at the same time be one word and two. It would have been easy to say "partly" *organized.*

The president is Professor Henry Sidgwick, known by his other deeds as the most incorrigibly and exasperatingly critical and sceptical mind in England. (James.)

William James couldn't have lived to be old — he was so "incorrigibly" young! But "other deeds" implies deeds mentioned in the context; and there aren't any.

I believe there are many writers who would gladly pay more attention to good form if their attention were from time to time drawn to questions of form and held steadily to the discussion of them. We cannot all be specialists in the same line, but "we" all prefer to be good speakers and writers. Human nature and the conditions

Digitized by Google

of life are such that, even with the best of intentions, one does not learn his lesson from sweeping general statements and occasional hints regarding their application.

This by way of apology, if any be needed, for multiplication of quotations and criticisms in the parallel columns.

Digitized by Google

## XXVII

### UNCLASSIFIED CONFUSIONS

I PAUSE to remark that it is time for a New Protestantism; for a Readers' Rebellion; perhaps a Society of Self-respecting Readers. With the verbal liberality of the British fatherland, we might call our organization The League for the Dissemination of Correct Views as to the Courtesy and Consideration Due from Writers to Readers. We are told that the worm will turn — the trouble with the *vermis Americanus* is that he won't turn; he makes his pathetic little joke on himself, lovable humorous beast that he is, and goes on getting stepped on.

Doubtless readers as such have no legal rights that writers are bound to respect, and as for moral rights, our rudimentary civilization is slow to recognize them; but we untutored savages are jealous for our good manners — get it into the heads of authors that socially it is bad



Digitized by Google

form to inflict upon us their misfit combinations of words, and they will begin to take notice of what they are doing. Our unripe democracy (if I may mix figures) has not stopped to think. As I walk the streets the children (for whom, as they suppose, the world was made) behave like hens; they will shy a little rather than be run over, but they don't understand that it is *unseemly* to be underfoot. And our clever writers, from critics to college-presidents, address us in language more seemly for a first draft in the discreet privacy of the study than for gracious public communication where we are in a way their invited guests. Many a slovenly article or book is the work of a writer whose heart is the home of all the courtesies. There is a criticism — more discriminating, indeed, than generous — that excludes social vulgarity from our dinner-tables; there ought to be a criticism that would exclude and discourage vulgarity of written English.

Without raising the question whether one who takes himself seriously can afford to read the literature of the day, it is fair to appeal to its producers not only for courtesy but for justice. Assuming, with them, that we are to read what they write, we face a very serious question — that

Digitized by Google

of the economy of attention. If we are to read widely, we must read rapidly; but we cannot read rapidly if we are held up continually by obscurities and ambiguities, and we cannot read well, or with rational enjoyment, if we hurry over the hard places unenlightened and unconvinced. It is a choice of evils — waste of time and strength, or mental dyspepsia.

Here are some misstatements or ambiguities:

If he thought with loathing of his former life, so did she. (Churchill.)

Judging from the context, one concludes that she was thinking of her own life.

Jesus prayed not that we be taken out of the world, but that we be kept in it. (Hall.)

This sentence gives a sense far from that of John, XVII, 15. Have we here a serious pun?

It has its distinct meaning for us, and we will carry it into all our reforming activity. (Hall.)

What a New-Yorker means by "will" in the first person is so uncertain that this sentence is not clear.

A prince was to come who was to bear her away from the ragmen and the boarding-houses and the soot: and incidentally, and in spite of herself, Aunt Mary was to come too.

When the novelist says that "Aunt Mary was to come too", he means (according to the context) that she was to *go away* too. It would have been civil to express the meaning.

But not only does such testimony as this controvert our comfortable theory of

Well, what about "the very facts"? With the context in hand, doubtless we

Digitized by Google

individual frailty as the explanation of poverty, but the very facts of poverty themselves. (Holmes.)

There exists, it appears, a class of persons who, either through ignorance or indifference, or often through both combined, are doing all in their power to corrupt the English tongue. (Lounsbury.)

could know the meaning; but why not make the sentence good, and let it carry its own sense!

Which "or" is correlated with "either"? Or are both so correlated?[1] Professor Lounsbury is not a purist, else one might judge by assuming the sentence to be formally correct.

The last sentence of Mr. Woodberry's book on "The Appreciation of Literature" reads as follows:

The great thing is to remain alive, in one's reading, and nowhere should the principle of life be more sacredly guarded than in its most immortal presence, imaginative literature and those other forms that take their color from its human methods.

There may be a good reason for using a comma after "alive", and for not using a semicolon after "reading" — this by the way. The sentence as printed puts "imaginative literature" and the rest

[1] If it is the first "or", we have (1) *either through the first or* (through) *the second — or* [as if an afterthought] *through both.* If the second, (2) *either through one-of-the-two or through both.* If both (the common *either . . . or . . . or*), (3) *either through the first or through the second or through both.* I wish not to quibble; but I wish I knew the gentleman's meaning. If he were a purist, I should settle upon "(2)."

Digitized by Google

in apposition with "its most immortal presence." Now imaginative literature, or any other kind, cannot possibly be identical with the "presence" of anything.

Here is a passage from Swinburne's "The Age of Shakespeare":

> It [Marlowe's Tamburlaine] is the first poem ever written in English blank verse, as distinguished from mere rhymeless decasyllabics; and it contains one of the noblest passages — perhaps, indeed, the noblest in the literature of the world — ever written by one of the greatest masters of poetry in loving praise of the glorious delights and sublime submission to the everlasting limits of his art.

I have tried faithfully to find the meaning of the second clause.

1. Some of the greatest masters of poetry have written passages in loving praise of the glorious delights of their art, and in sublime submission to its everlasting limits. Marlowe's Tamburlaine contains one of the noblest of these — perhaps the noblest of them all.

2. Marlowe, who is one of the greatest masters of poetry, has written a number of passages in loving praise, etc. His Tamburlaine contains one of the noblest of these — and indeed this is

Digitized by Google

perhaps the noblest passage of the kind in the literature of the world.

If the clause has a sense that was clearly conceived in the writer's mind, that sense would seem to be indicated either by "1." or by "2." Neither interpretation is satisfactory. Of course a sentence so badly constructed by a writer of ordinary ability would not deserve study.

I am overstocked with specimens which I have been labeling, for my own convenience, "Chaos."

No one gave surer proofs of that sympathy than by the way in which he [De Tocqueville] philosophizes. (Brooks.)

Not a sentence. Part of what should have been a sentence is missing, the other parts are flung together.

It was a mistake either to print the report at all or to fail to give it the widest possible publicity. (Newspaper.)

This should mean that either course was a mistake. It was intended to convey that if one was not a mistake, the other was.

Subordinate conjunctions connect clauses; co-ordinate conjunctions connect sentences. (D. J. Hill.)

A coördinate conjunction connects subordinate clauses, just as well as independent sentences.

He knew that Valmond understood whereof he spoke. It was as if an artist saw a young genius use a brush on

It seems pretty nearly certain that if Sir Gilbert wrote "watch", he meant (or would have meant if he

Digitized by Google

canvas for a moment; a swordsman watch an unknown master of the sword. (Parker.)

Hold to it eternally that the clad man *is* still naked if it amuse you — 'tis designated in the bond; but the so-called contradiction is a sterile boon. Like Shylock's pound of flesh, it leads to no consequences. It does not entitle you to one drop of his Christian blood either in the way of catarrh, social exclusion, or what further results pure nakedness may involve. (James.)

had been quite awake) *watched*. But the infinitive starts the reader on the wrong track.

High spirits and exuberant utterance. Would that many another scholar and writer might keep the spirit of a boy in the work — or the productive play — of the grown man. But the boy needs to be steadied by the man's trained hand. He has mixed things, I think, in a way that is much more boyish than funny; and he didn't even stop to cut out the "either."

This is the work of a "Ph.D., LL.D.", scholar and man of affairs, who has been lecturer on Political Economy at three of our great universities:

Governor Wilson's sound and rational point of view, that no matter how grave an injustice may have been perpetrated, if its tendrils are so entwined with great national interests that its immediate up-rooting would cause great disturbance, the wise thing to do is to bring about the necessary change by a succession of steps, instead of all at once.

It was printed as a sentence, and presumably intended by the writer to be a sentence; but it has no predicate. Without stopping to comment

Digitized by Google

on the tendrils of a grave injustice, I note that the article from which I have quoted has " . . . of similar portent to the announcement of a great discovery in science." But even if portent (here a pure abstraction) can be similar to an announcement, the author probably does not mean that it is. Again, "One can imagine how many political descendants of Hon. [*sic;* it sounds Japanese!] Rufus Choate would have utilized the occasion." Ambiguous enough. These descendants would have said "that labor was a doubly important factor to capital." Comment is needless. There are two non-exclamatory sentences (according to the punctuation) in which "so" is used without a correlative. There are two cases of "straddle." The statement is made that "there seems practical certainty." There is punctuation which not only is bad but makes a bad ambiguity. And such an article is printed in a (relatively) high-class weekly.

Return we now to the narrow columns.

Retribution they should have, but let them have it in the only way worthy of a great people to inflict. (Lowell.)

Surely this is not the way worthy of a great author to write — if I may venture to imitate him.

Digitized by Google

With a representation, three fifths of it based on the assumption that negroes are men, the South turns upon us and insists on our acknowledging that they are things. (Lowell.) [1]

If two sevenths of the population were free, Lowell's figures were correct. Counting 3,700,000 slaves, we had in 1861, according to Lowell, 1,480,000 free Southerners. There were, in fact, 5,300,000.

A single man in the Missouri valley can manage to till as large an area as a whole village in the Nile valley can produce.

This was written by a great journalist. If a whole village produced an area, it would be a case of "made land."

At the worst he would stand where he had stood before I crossed his path — with but one man between him and the throne, and that man an impostor . . . ("Anthony Hope.")

Before "I" crossed his path, the one man between Michael and the throne, if I have the story aright, was not an impostor, but the King. "I" (Rassendyll) was the impostor.

. . . engaged in appeasing the great British hunger for news; second only to that for beef, it seems, and equally acceptable salted when it cannot be had fresh. (Meredith.)

Speaking of one of Meredith's lawless expressions, an admirer of his work said, "He gets *atmosphere*", and so on. Probably the idea of British news-hunger "salted" gives "atmosphere."

As there is hardly any situation, however, so interesting to reflect upon as

Atmosphere, again. Quite seriously, (1) if the words from "without" to "pride"

[1] Constitution, Art. I, Sec. II, Par. 3. Computing on the basis of John Fiske's figures for the whole South, we have about twenty-two seventy-fifths (less than half of L.'s three fifths) of the representation in '61 "based on the assumption" that a negro is *three fifths of a man.*

Digitized by Google

that of a man without a penny in his pocket, and a gizzard full of pride, we will leave Mr. Evan Harrington to what adventures may befall him. . . . (Meredith.)

were written by an ordinary man they would be inexcusable nonsense; and (2) being the work of an extraordinary man, they are conspicuously nonsensical and inexcusable.

In any other than an heiress, she would probably have thought: "This is indeed a disgusting little animal, and most unfeminine conduct." (Meredith.)

"In any other than" a genius, one would probably have thought: "This is indeed a chaotic little sentence, and most unreasonable expression."

Nothing was better known to Fancy than the extravagant manner in which these circular knots or eyes [in panes of "knotty" green glass] distorted everything seen through them from the outside — . . . scattering the spokes of cart-wheels, and bending the straight fir-trunks into semicircles. (Hardy.)

Cart-wheels and trees are seen through windows from the *inside*. This, I take it, is not a case of getting atmosphere, but of getting the sense wrong. If a proof-reader did it, remember that Hardy can have his own way with the proofs, provided he will take the trouble to attend to them.

Before leaving the subject of Clearness I wish to comment upon some passages taken from a small fraction of Mr. Frederic Harrison's famous essay, "The Choice of Books."

Yet are all men desirable companions, much less teachers, able to give advice, even of those who get reputation and command a hearing?

Digitized by Google

I assume that "able" qualifies "teachers." The expression "much . . . advice", then, being in form entirely foreign to the context, might have been marked accordingly, by using the dash before and after. And still the sentence would have been bad.

And this, which comes home to all of us at times, presses hardest upon those who have lost the opportunity of systematic education, who have to educate themselves, or who seek to guide the education of their young people.

1. Are the three relative clauses after "those" coördinate, as they should be? If so, we have three distinct classes embarrassed by "an illimitable and ever-swelling literature." But he can hardly mean to particularize and distinguish (*a*) those who have had the opportunity and lost it, (*b*) those who have to educate themselves, and (*c*) those who seek to guide, etc.

2. If the two following "who"-clauses depend upon "those who . . . education", then the sentence is not only ambiguous, but so needlessly awkward as to be unworthy of a scholar.

Generations of men of culture have laboured to organise a system of reading and materials appropriate for the methodical education of men in academic lines.

Digitized by Google

1. Beginning with "materials", we may take it as object of "organize", or as governed by "of."

2. Beginning with "appropriate", we may take it as qualifying "system", or "reading and materials", or "materials."

3. We know what "in academic lines" depends upon; but there is a formal ambiguity, which might have been avoided.

. . . as men who in thorny paths have borne the heat and burden of the day might give a clue to their journey to those who have yet a morning and a noon.

Whose journey? The pronoun "their" should refer to "men", but, in view of the context, probably does not. Why should there be any conflict, real or apparent, between sense and sentence-structure? Further, there is an avoidable ambiguity in form.

It is so certain that information . . . is now grown to proportions so utterly incalculable and prodigious, that even the learned . . . can but pick up some crumbs that fall from the table of truth.

When Frederic Harrison writes a sentence like this, we may think he has used one "so" in the schoolgirl way; but it is only after some examination of the sentence, if at all, that we can be sure

Digitized by Google

he has. Here, the context does not give one the needed help by justifying such use.

> Indeed, we may easily so act that we may make it [the art of printing] a clog on the progress of the human mind, a real curse and not a boon.

I find the repetition of "we may" by no means "elegant"; and, style aside, I do not believe Mr. Harrison's thought was so complicated as to require the repetition. Why not *so act as to make it?*

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# EASE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# XXVIII

## PRELIMINARY

THE technical use of the word *ease* to denote a positive quality of style is not recognized in my dictionary. So much the worse, again, for the dictionary. Professor A. S. Hill defined Ease long ago as "the quality which makes language agreeable." It is not necessary, nor always to be desired, that the reader should know why the language is agreeable, or even stop to think that it is agreeable. The writer who goes to work to exhibit the pleasing features of his style is on dangerous ground; let him beware lest by posing he violate the very principle of ease.

The quality that makes the reader enjoy the style may come legitimately (1) from craftsmanship which avoids offenses against ease; (2) from a gracious personality, liberally cultivated, whose medium of expression is inevitably marked by grace and distinction; (3) from an enthusiasm,



Digitized by Google

always under control, which can express itself in nothing short of a warm, rich, or even exuberant style — from a wealth of thought, of feeling, of imagination, which creates for itself such genuine and generous eloquence as, for example, we have in Newman and Ruskin at their best.

There be not many so well born, well trained, and well read, and withal so informed with the spirit of all goodness and beauty, as to be effectually called to the higher ranges of literary expression; and even for such there is no short and easy road — though there is indeed a royal road — to their destination. But there are, and will continue to be, countless writers of higher or lower degree who ought to do their work far better than they have done it, and far better than ordinary writers have ever done it. For all such it is important that they should at least know what to avoid; and knowing what to avoid is in effect knowing what to aim at and strive for. To trained workmen I do not profess to give instruction; but because in my own experience to have my attention called to an error has been so often the beginning of an effort henceforth to avoid it, I have confidence that other sincere workmen will be interested and helped if I make them think

Digitized by Google

of faults to which they have paid little attention hitherto. And confidence in this regard is not without support from observation. I have reason to think that not only a beginner, but even an able veteran may respond readily and easily to suggestion along the lines of this book; may welcome these simple criticisms when they apply to his own work, as well as be quick to see their bearing upon the work of others.

"The quality that makes language agreeable" manifests itself in many ways. The surprising doctrine that style is a matter of "cadence and sound-sequence" [1] would narrow good style down to a single specific quality under the general head of ease — *i.e.*, to euphony. Such definition would make it a fraction, only, of what is not the most important among half-a-dozen requisites of good discourse. Ease indeed requires pleasing sounds in agreeable sequences and relations; and this requirement forbids cloying excess of "linkèd sweetness long drawn out", effeminate monotony of soft smooth speech — the overdoing of euphony, which is not pleasing to the cultivated taste. Ease forbids not only what jars upon the ear, but all combinations and collocations, whether

[1] See page 10.

Digitized by Google

euphonious or not, that offend the sense of fitness.

If you attain ease, what you write will be literally easy to read. There must be no ambiguity or obscurity — every sin against clearness violates ease — no strain upon the attention through excessive length of sentences or needless complexity of structure, no needless toil of memory, no over-driving the wits to keep up with mere displays of cleverness; for ease forbids imposition upon the reader of labor beyond what the nature of the thought or the essential difficulty of the subject requires.[1] All that is awkward and clumsy, of course, is out of place. Every violation of good taste, whether in language or in subject-matter, is a sin against ease. Dulness, banality, tediousness, all manner of "wasteful and ridiculous excess", is the enemy of ease.

Keeping strictly within the definition, I have shown some of its implications without trying to give them all. This is to prepare the reader,

[1] Thackeray came nearest to the exclusion of the unpolite. Later, George Meredith, with aristocratic *hauteur*, forced that exclusion, and even, through individual peculiarities of style and method, made his fiction insufferably difficult to many of the polite. . . . Thomas Hardy, the greatest master of English fiction, presents no such difficulty, and has compelled all classes of readers. (Alden.)

Digitized by Google

if perchance he has given little thought to these matters, for seeing readily the bearing upon our present theme of many and various misuses of language, the work of many writers wise or foolish, some of which might seem too insignificant to dwell upon. Be it added, with all emphasis, that the quality of ease is abundantly worth cultivating for any and every purpose of communication by means of words written or spoken.

Digitized by Google

# XXIX

## TWO FORMS OF CLUMSINESS

THE split infinitive is so common that it would be a waste of time to gather many illustrations of its use. Let us admit that it can hardly be regarded as a solecism, and that much may be said in its defense. Yet there is truth in the assertion that careful writers avoid it, and there is reason for avoiding it.

"To simultaneously send two messages" shows the needless "split", and so does Mr. Roosevelt's "to, in revenge, assail a camp." I quote also from Miss Jewett:

> She sent for a tuner, and used to successfully coax the long-imprisoned music from the antiquated piano, and sing for her visitors by the hour.
>
> . . . when she makes mistakes she is sorrier and more ready to hopefully try again than any girl I know.

I suppose most "careful writers" would consider at least the first three of these split infinitives



Digitized by Google

inelegant; and I confess I do not like the fourth. The combination "used to successfully coax" presents a very harsh sequence of consonants, easily avoided; and the omission of *other* before "girl" is a license which might be left to writers of less distinction. A newspaper, defending the split infinitive, gives the sentence, "Negotiations are being made to further cement friendship" (whose author "asserts that the English cannot be improved"), and "I wish to more than thank you." If the first cannot be improved, throw it away, and be rid of the ill-expressed "Negotiations are being made", which is worse than the rest of it. *I wish to say that I am more than thankful* is one of various forms which might easily take the place of the second.

He that splits the infinitive recklessly will sometimes do it clumsily. I venture the opinion that in nine cases out of ten, if not in forty-nine out of fifty, the modifier of the infinitive may be put elsewhere than after the *to*, without sacrifice of clearness, force, ease, or anything else worth saving. It is the height of folly to assume that words once set down must stand unchanged. To shrink from the labor of needed revision argues not only congenital fatigue, but want of respect

Digitized by Google

both for oneself and for the reader. Let us highly resolve that if we ever split an infinitive, we will know the reason why.

I take pleasure in quoting a paragraph from Professor A. S. Hill's "Principles of Rhetoric":

> Ease prohibits an arrangement that throws the emphasis *on*, and thus causes a suspension of the sense *at*, a particle or other unimportant word (as in this sentence). Such an arrangement is hostile to clearness, for it obliges the mind to halt at the very points which it would naturally hurry over; it is also hostile to force, for it emphasizes words that do not "deserve distinction" at the expense of those that do.

This arrangement I venture to call a *straddle*. In the professor's sentence two imaginary lines, symbolic of grammatical relation, diverge from the noun "particle" to the italicized prepositions. I do not know that the Yale champion of usage and idiom defended the straddle — perhaps if his attention had been called to the distinguished names of those who have employed it (*vid. infra; cf.* Hill, p. 198 *sq.*), he would have lifted up his clarion voice in its behalf. Here are some cases, all interesting — though not all of the same type.

| | |
|---|---|
| . . . a bull even better than, although not quite so old as, mine. (Roosevelt.) | This matches well with Professor Hill's specifications, quoted above. |

Digitized by Google

Some minor defects developed, and were quickly, or rather being, corrected. (Naval officer.)

When an accomplished sailor tries his best to do his worst, expect results.

This power has never been widely, but in many cases it has been deeply, felt. (Mabie.)

The straddle is never an easy attitude; this sentence seems weak on its legs.

. . . a hardy, though not so strenuous climate as to diminish the vitality . . . (Shaler.)

Transfer of one word would have transformed an exceedingly awkward piece of English.

. . . a practice very common among ships in foreign parts, by which you get rid of the books you have read and re-read, and a supply of new ones in their stead . . . (Dana.)

A boyish and breezy play on "get", this coördinating "rid" and "supply" as its complements. I wonder if he smiled when he wrote the sentence. Probably he did not see the joke.

. . . it may irritate and antagonize, but can never bore, the reader. (Miss Scudder.)

Not extremely bad; but why should it not have been made smooth and faultless?

. . . has also been good enough to read, and suggest corrections in the preliminary essays. (Lang.)

Here, and elsewhere, Lang omits the second comma. No punctuation, I think, can make this arrangement good.

These are much more familiar with and naturally are much more acted upon by the great literature of the past than by any grammatical treatises of the present. (Lounsbury.)

This fully meets the Harvard man's specifications, unless the absence of commas be counted in its favor, and adds to the awkwardness of the straddle that of an unsymmetrical comparison.

Digitized by Google

| | |
|---|---|
| . . . that the lad had now reached, indeed for some days had stood halting, at one of the great partings of the ways. (Allen.) | According to the punctuation, *had now reached at one of the great partings of the ways*. This is going from bad straddle to worse. |
| The easy, and therefore the usual, course . . . (A. S. Hill.) | He approves the straddle, then, except on "unimportant" words? |

A few more cases are so bad that they ought to be exhibited. I do not quote from Ruskin, because the specimens I have from him are not of special interest.

. . . that exuberant mass of goods with which all human nature is in travail, and groaning to bring to the light of day. (James.)

. . . the anarchy he has allowed himself to be made a tool of by evoking. (Lowell.)

. . . the wise and radiant talk to which all the world has listened and will miss. (Aldrich.)

. . . but it has not yet, and never will be, thoroughly adopted by his imagination. (Stevenson.)

. . . one against whom, haply, he had bumped in a crowded thoroughfare, and had with cordial politeness begged pardon of. (Meredith.)

I confess I do not like the name *straddle;* but it is better, I think, than the clumsy arrangement for which it stands.

Digitized by Google

## XXX

### PUNCTUATION AND EASE

In the preceding chapter I could not keep clear of the subject of punctuation; in this, I must recur for a moment to the subject of straddle — for the prolific Pater involves me in both.

He writes of "the loss of, or carelessness for personal beauty even in those whom men have wronged," achieving both a straddle and a squinting construction, and omitting the commas after "for" and "beauty" which his own painful system of punctuation seems to require. A little study leads to the conclusion that "in" connects "those" with "loss" and "carelessness" — but the relations of words to each other within a small fragment of a sentence should be plain without study; and all the more when the sentence is so long as this one, which contains at least two hundred and thirty-five words. Again, Pater speaks of "the living energy of an intelligence of



Digitized by Google

the same kind as though vaster in scope than the human." Here there is no internal punctuation. Accustomed to a ridiculous excess of commas, the reader may fall into the "as though" trap. He quickly extricates himself, no doubt; but he has not found the sentence easy or "agreeable" reading.

In Mrs. Phelps Ward's "A Singular Life", her publishers — and I suppose that, excepting mine, there are none better — have had printed many such expressions as "the clean, spare room"; "the long, stone steps"; "the cold, pecuniary facts"; "the old, illuminated, swinging sign"; "the religious, old fisherman"; "big, hothouse bouquets." This, which looks like the work of an incompetent type-setter, makes positively disagreeable reading; it blemishes a book of real merit.

"If we add to these, the portions of her autobiography devoted to us" forms part of a sentence by Mr. John Graham Brooks which contains fourteen commas. He might have spared us the annoyance of the worse than useless "stop" after "these." The same writer begins a sentence with "As one of our haunting perplexities will be in avoiding local standards of comparison,

Digitized by Google

as our institutions . . . are brought to the bar," and by putting a comma after "comparison", adds a momentary ambiguity to the inelegant use of "as" in two widely different senses.

A few illustrations of jerk, jolt, and clutter:

We have come very early to understand, that, in many instances, disease is social in its consequences.

The first comma is useless, the second is needless, the third is not required. The effect is harsh.

If, whilst they profess only to please, they secretly advise, and give instruction, they may now, perhaps, as well as formerly, be esteemed, with justice, the best and most honourable among authors. (Lord Shaftesbury.)

Quoted by Blair for its clearness, and used by A. S. Hill without rebuke. To read it is like riding over an old-fashioned corduroy road badly out of repair, in a springless cart.

. . . fifteen years back, in such and such a year, Wednesday's dish had been, by shameful oversight, furnished him for Tuesday's, and he had eaten it quietly, but refused his Port; which pathetic event had caused alarm and inquiry, when the error was discovered, and apologized for, the old gentleman merely saying "Don't let it happen again." (Meredith.)

Which is worse, Meredith or the noble lord? Shaftesbury's jolts come thicker, but the triviality of what Meredith is writing about makes his ridiculous formality perhaps more ridiculous than my lord's. Besides, Meredith belongs, chronologically, to our own times. The theory might be advanced that the punctuation was intended to be humorous. I think it was not.

. . . and they might have spoken to her wits, but that

I think this makes against a possible theory that in his

Digitized by Google

mortals cannot, unaided, guess, or will not, unless struck in the face by the fact, credit, what is to their minds the last horror. (Mcredith.)

It begets in those, who, coming across him in youth, can bear him at all, a habit of reading between the lines, . . . (Pater.)

In 1798 he visited Germany, then, the only half-known, "promised land", of the metaphysical, the "absolute", philosophy. (Pater.)

I have never heard that psalm since without its bringing back that summer night in Deephaven, the beautiful quaint old room, and Kate and I feeling so young and worldly, by contrast, the flickering, shaded light of the candles, the old book, and the voices that said Amen. (Miss Jewett.)

passage about old Tom, quoted above, Meredith meant to make the punctuation solemnly unreasonable; for here he makes a serious sentence harsh.

As we have seen, Pater is not consistent. Omitting the comma at the expense of clearness, why insert it and violate ease?

Was it an oversight that prevented his working in a comma after the date? So, he would have neared the limit.

"There is something *well-bred* about her style, which I miss in so many others." More's the pity that this sentence, which might have been made so good, is spoiled by the weakness and clutter in the middle of it. A little change would have made a great difference.

These two of Pater's sentences belong together:

1. Some English critics at the beginning of the present century had a great deal to say concerning a distinction, of much importance, as they thought, in the true estimate of poetry, between the Fancy, and another more powerful faculty — the Imagination.

Digitized by Google

2. In his changes of political sentiment, Coleridge was associated with the "Lake School"; and there is yet one other very different sort of sentiment in which he is one with that school, yet all himself, his sympathy, namely, with the animal world.

1. Punctuation should be a help to the reader; Pater's punctuation is often a hindrance. Yet if "another" must precede "more powerful", a comma between would probably help matters. If imagination is "another more powerful faculty", then fancy, just mentioned, must be *one* "more powerful faculty" — and that is not at all what he means. The wording, however, is bad; for with the comma inserted, "another" must be taken as *an other*, and such analysis of the compound is felt as an offense against ease. Putting *a* in place of "another" would relieve the situation.

2. Here Pater's fondness for the comma fails him just where a comma is needed. According to the sentence as punctuated, "political sentiment" is *one* "very different sort of sentiment", and "sympathy . . . with the animal world" is another. A dash would have been proper after "himself", as it is after "faculty" in the first quotation, and would have made easier reading.

Digitized by Google

I doubt if this stylist cared to make easy reading, even where he could have done so without any sacrifice except of time and strength.

I fear the Oxford don, in general, is no democrat. In his "still air of delightful studies" there is probably too much of "*Odi profanum vulgus et arceo.*" And even where the student is passionately democratic in theory, he may as author scorn to avoid that which is "caviar to the general." Now it is both ill-judged and ill-mannered to "talk down" to one's audience; but on the other hand it is reasonable and courteous so to frame one's discourse that he who reads shall not be needlessly distracted, annoyed, confused, or baffled. The subject-matter may in itself present difficulties which cannot be escaped without shirking, or overcome without intense application; the treatment of it should scrupulously avoid adding to such difficulties, or putting any reader at a disadvantage who has the requisite brains and the will to use them. In that fine spirit of kindness which is at the root of all genuine courtesy let the writer thus put himself in the reader's place, and he will do himself good. Setting himself to talk straight, he will find it necessary to think straight. Criticising his own

Digitized by Google

work according to an exacting and generous standard, he will find it taking form and finish under his hand. Enlarging his audience by clarifying his style, he will commend his work all the more to the elect ones of the inner circle. By his democracy he will do somewhat towards bringing about that aristocracy we all wish for — the ascendency of the best.

Courtesy as a duty of the writer to the reader is not a hackneyed theme; surely some mention of it is not out of place when we are discussing Ease, which might be defined as the good manners of style. Men and women there be who, not lacking in efficiency, have that delightful combination of qualities to which we give the name of Charm; and this genius for agreeableness raises their other excellencies to the *n*th power. Ease in discourse and Charm in the intercourse of life have much in common.

Digitized by Google

## XXXI

### EUPHONY

Mr. Cooper quotes Zola as saying of Flaubert: "He weighed every word, examining not only the meaning but the conformation as well. Avoidance of repetitions, of rhymes, of harsh sounds was merely the rough beginning of his task. He went so far as not to allow the same syllables to recur in a phrase . . ." Doubtless Flaubert carried too far his painful toil for the utmost finish. Those who are writing English in these days are certainly in no danger of overdoing the *labor limae*. It is very true that most readers are not critical in this regard; it does not follow that good work would be wasted upon them. As the mere negative fault of not cultivating refined manners may keep a worthy and able person from social recognition, so ignoring the nicer requirements of good style may put a writer at serious disadvantage; and even



Digitized by Google

with those who are quite incapable of judging his workmanship.

> I do not like you, Doctor Fell;
> The reason why I cannot tell.

When Professor Lounsbury writes that something or other "serves as a satisfactory substitute", he gains nothing by the alliteration and loses much by the hissing. This fault of using too many sibilants (*s*, *z*, *sh*, *zh*, *ch* = *tsh*, *j*) is more common, I suspect, than the effort to avoid it. It is a pleasure to quote Mr. Aldrich in this connection. The italics are his.

"And *s*he *s*huddered a*s* *s*he *s*at, *s*till *s*ilent, on her *s*eat, and he *s*aw that *s*he *s*huddered." This is from Anthony Trollope's novel, "Can You Forgive Her?" Can you forgive him? is the next question.

Some further illustrations of sibilation, in which I have italicized the sibilants:

A*s* he come*s* to thi*s* country, one of hi*s* fir*s*t impre*ss*ion*s* of the American*s* i*s* that "they are e*x*tremely open to compa*ss*i*o*n", a*s* *sh*own, among other e*x*ample*s*, in their admini*s*tra*ti*on of *j*u*s*tice. (Brooks.)

I was about to say that the sibilation speaks for itself. So indeed does mine. Let us ask, in passing, *what* is "shown." Is it "compassion", or the fact that "they are extremely open to compassion"?

Digitized by Google

| | |
|---|---|
| He wanted to once more look upon the *s*cene of the *s*ufferings of hi*s* companion*s* in arm*s*. | The split infinitive, perfectly easy to avoid, is perhaps a worse fault than the sibilation. |
| The *Sixth's* los*s* was greater than that of any re*g*iment except the *Sixteenth*. | "Sixth's" is more needless than unpronounceable. The omission of *other* is illogical. |
| He ha*s* been the *s*ubject of the alway*s* alert *s*u*s*picion*s* of government offici*a*l*s* and of *s*trang*e* people*s* *j*ealou*s* of intru*s*ion*s* into their land. | One may do what he will with his own. The author should have found it easy to eliminate a few of his seventeen sibilants. |
| *Such* a doctrine i*s* e*s*sen*ti*ally *s*uperfici*a*l, and *such* will be it*s* effect*s*. (Newman.) | The two uses of *such* are not well related, and the second is not quite clear. |
| And any one book whi*ch* trie*s* to do even a*s* mu*ch* a*s* thi*s* mu*s*t practice *s*evere *s*elf-re*s*trai*n*t in it*s* *ch*oice of material. | The writer may not have noticed the surd *s*-sound, unvaried, occurring seven times in "this . . . its." He may not have disliked it. |
| Therefore we fulfil the law of our being *s*o far a*s* our being i*s* æ*s*thetic and intellective, a*s* well a*s* *s*o far a*s* it i*s* moral. (Arnold.) | This bad sentence is quoted without rebuke by the Standard Dictionary (under Faulty Diction),[1] to illustrate a proper use of *so*. |

In the phrases *as well as*, *so far as*, and the like, the final *as* is in its function clearly a relative. In its various relative uses it has the antecedents *same*, *such*, *so*, and *as*. Notice that the first three have dental initials, characteristic of the

[1] 1909.

Digitized by Google

demonstrative words so much used as antecedents; compare *this, that, the,* and *tam, talis, tot,* τοσοῦτος, etc. There is grammatical analogy, then, as well as euphony, in favor of beginning these phrases with *so* rather than *as,* wherever the sense admits of so doing.

Perhaps every one will admit that after a negative, *so* is a better antecedent than *as* if there is even a little demonstrative emphasis to be conveyed. Also it may be assumed that in Arnold's sentence, given above, *so* is rightly used "if the extent or degree . . . is to be emphasized at all (however slightly)"; and to one or two other phrases similar to his the same principle applies. I will give, without comment, a number of quotations in which I think a change of "as" to *so* would be an improvement.

But things are by no means as bad as they recently have been. (President Hadley.)

If the old gospel of individualism should hereafter change into the gospel of socialism, the change would not be half as great as that involved in the surrender of the ascetic ideal of the Christian life.
(Rauschenbusch.)

The fringes of the cities are not nearly as bad as they were thirty or forty years ago. (Van Dyke.)

Digitized by Google

The word Compromise, as far as Slavery is concerned, has always been of fatal augury. (Lowell.)

As far as concerned Canada his mind was purely historical. . . (Howells.)

As far as I knew, there was no reason why she should not love her cousin Paul, if she admired him half as much as her brother was inclined to do. (Crawford.)

. . . mostly as well let alone as far as description goes. (Muir.)

As long as men are interesting to one another, as long as the infinite complexities of modern emotion play about situations that are as old as the race, so long will there be an opportunity for the free development of the short story as a literary form. (Perry.)

"This constant suggestion of an absolute duality between higher and lower moods, and the work done in them," says Walter Pater, ". . . makes the reading of Wordsworth an excellent sort of training towards the things of art and poetry." This sentence begins with a harsh combination of sibilants (six in the first three words), dentals, and gutturals. Doubtless "work" is governed by "between" — a preposition which both by derivation and by meaning calls for a plural. The incongruity might have been avoided by a little more "work." The seventeen words from

Digitized by Google

"makes" to "poetry" inclusive will bear study. Observe the steady trochaic-dactylic movement with ten stresses, and the nineteen dental sounds, of which six are sibilant (I count only one sibilant in "excellent"). Somebody will be counting dentals in this last sentence of mine! But my numerical statement, bad as it may be, is at least broken up into four parts, and does not hammer away like a metronome. In Pater's sentence one peculiarity seems literally to accentuate the other.

Andrew Lang says that something "had originally a religious sense." This, I suppose, would be simply intolerable to an artist like Flaubert. I have forgotten who wrote, "Those which would still grow he washed tenderly night and morning with his watering-pot." The use of "which", where *that* would have served perfectly well, makes a harsh sequence; and combinations like "washed tenderly", which cannot be easily pronounced, might as well be avoided.

Speaking of *which* — Lowell is hardly at his best in this:

> . . . by an appeal to that authority which is of divine right, inasmuch as its office is to maintain that order which is the single attribute of the Infinite Reason

Digitized by Google

that we can clearly apprehend and of which we have hourly example.

From Mrs. Phelps Ward:

He was learning not to mind his straw mattress as much as he did at first.

The harshness of "his straw mattress as much as" is evident enough. We have seen that in such a case *so* is the right word to be correlated with the following "as"; and the correct and masculine form of expression would be also comparatively euphonious. A little break in a harsh "sound-sequence" makes a great difference.

I have here merely touched upon the subject of euphony, on which a volume would have to be written to do it justice. Some qualified specialist might well do for prose, along this and related lines, a work comparable with that of Sidney Lanier in his "Science of English Verse." While no amount of science can take the place of "*studium et aures*" — "taste and an appreciative ear", on the other hand that æsthetic literary criticism which merely sets down personal impressions, without definite exposition on which minds can meet, is of comparatively little use,

Digitized by Google

I believe, to most readers and writers. There needs to be investigation of facts, formulation of principles, simple but accurate terminology. The ground needs to be cleared and mapped out for students; and every writer and every reader ought to be a student.

Digitized by Google

## XXXII

### THE AWKWARD SQUAD (I)

LIFE is, among other things, a very interesting opportunity to acquire inward and spiritual grace by sincerely cultivating its outward and visible signs. The graces belong to the fitness of things, and normally spring out of good will. One cannot lift himself in a basket, nor win grace by saying Go to, now, let us be graceful; but we can try to do well whatever we have to do; and we can consider the other fellow. Ease is the sum of certain well-bred qualities in discourse; and a few gentle hints concerning what is and what is not suited to the peculiar social intercourse of reader and writer may do no harm.

A statement may be so unworkmanlike as to be rude and plebeian; therefore I quote here from James Russell Lowell a sentence or two which might properly appear in a very different connection:



Digitized by Google

*Strike* and *string:* from the game of nine-pins; to make a *strike* is to knock down all the pins with one ball, hence it has come to mean fortunate, successful.

*To the halves* still survives among us, though apparently obsolete in England. It means either to let or to hire a piece of land, receiving half the profit in money or in kind (*partibus locare*).

Of course, "to make a strike" could not "come to mean fortunate", or come to have any other adjective sense. And of course "to the halves", an adverbial phrase, could never mean "to let or to hire", or to do anything else whatsoever. From long and intimate familiarity with Yankee speech, I should say that *et the halves* or *'t the halves* is what Lowell's own Hosea Biglow would have said, and "to the halves", only an exceptional illiterate variant. To speak of *hiring* a piece of land and "receiving" half sounds a bit odd, to say the least. The man that "takes" land at the halves — I think I never once heard of *hiring* it in this way — *gives* half the product for the use of the land, and *retains* rather than receives the other half, which was never in the land-owner's possession. I say "product"; for the "profit" of the man who works the land is what is left of his half of the product after deduct-

Digitized by Google

ing expenses, and the profit of the owner is his half less expense, if any. *Partibus locare* does not mean to "hire", in the sense in which Lowell uses the word, but to *put out*, so to speak, on shares.

We are all proud of Lowell, though we may discriminate. He knew well how to hold our own, if I may so speak, against the superciliousness of our insular cousins. If he was not impeccable in his English, neither are they. Newman writes, ". . . here I do but say that there are two ways of using knowledge, and in matter of fact [*sic*] those who use it in one way are not likely to use it in the other, or at least in a very limited measure." Mr. Hardy has "her habitual indifference alone to dress", where I suppose *only*, in its proper place, would have expressed his meaning. Matthew Arnold is always interesting, not to say charming, but he is not always elegant:

> . . . culture, which . . . is no longer debarred, by a rigid invincible exclusion of whatever is new, from getting acceptance for its ideas, simply because they are new.
>
> And one would think, that property, assigned for the purpose of providing for a people's religious worship when that worship was one, the State should, when that worship is split into several forms, apportion between those several forms.

Digitized by Google

Was there ever yet an author who did not need to be reminded that when a sentence proves ugly and intractable, the better part of valor is in pitching it overboard! It is not always wasteful to throw words away — "there are plenty more where they came from." Cicero could wear his periodic style like an easy garment; but Arnold, staggering under a burden of Latinized English that does not fit him, is like David in Saul's armor.

Returning to the "homeland":

> . . . who died so prematurely at Walmer castle after her return from India, a victim of the latter's climate. (American Newspaper.)

> Is it likely that the science of our day will escape the common doom; that the minds of its votaries will never look old-fashioned to the grandchildren of the latter? (James.)

High philosophy and journalism meet on common ground of infelicity. How often do you hear "the latter" in conversation? All we that write could learn much, I suspect, by "takin' notes" of every-day talk. If we must use formalities, let us be careful how we use them.

Into the debate about his existence, I will not pretend to enter. I must take up humbler ground, and

Digitized by Google

limit my ambition to showing that a God, whether existent or not, is at all events the kind of being which, if he did exist, would form *the most adequate possible object* for minds framed like our own to conceive as lying at the root of the universe. (James.)

The meaning, probably, is something like this: "I must . . . limit my ambition to showing that a God is *the most adequate possible object* for minds like ours to conceive as lying at the root of the universe." With all modesty be it suggested that there was no need of putting in the present condition contrary to fact "if he did exist", which in the plain way of speech implies non-existence, and so is rather harshly out of harmony with "whether existent or not." No need of making the reader think of taking "up" the ground; no need of bringing in the grotesque conception of a deity "lying at the root of the universe." In dealing with the profoundest and most difficult questions that can engage the human mind, it is not easy to make easy reading; but the language ought surely to be as straightforward and lucid, in every sense as easy to read, as the wit of man can make it.

Now a few pieces of Professor Lounsbury's

Digitized by Google

English, which is always interesting, and sometimes instructive.

Had during those centuries the form been generally adopted by writers of the highest grade . . .

Not quite English, really. It is bookish, and harsh. Why not use an *if*, as no doubt the professor would have done in conversation?

In the line previously cited from Byron, "to vainly bleed" will seem to most men a more emphatic way of stating the fact than it would be by using "vainly to bleed" or "to bleed vainly."

I suppose he means that "to vainly bleed" will seem to most men more emphatic than "vainly to bleed" or "to bleed vainly." His "it" probably refers to "to vainly bleed", but it cannot so refer without inexcusable awkwardness. Again, "to vainly bleed" is not a "way of stating the fact"; it states nothing, emphatically or otherwise.

One point indeed there is which the average man of education, or rather the man of average education, seems wholly incapable of comprehending. He cannot be made to see that it is the meaning which living men put into the words they use that is alone of any significance; that of very trifling significance is the meaning that dead men have given to those from which the former have come.

Digitized by Google

This "man of average education" is rather hard to place. He must be, educationally, a good many degrees below the average educated man, for the illiterates, the uneducated, and the half-educated make a great showing in the average. While the professor on sober consideration "lets out" the "average man of education", I think he need not. Educated men can hardly be thought capable of seeing the truth of his main proposition (ending with "is alone of any significance"), or of the second; which, however, is obviously inconsistent with the first. At least, if a man of education has in dealing with words constantly found profit in considering their derivation, he will be slow to admit that the meaning of those from which they have come is "of very trifling significance." It is interesting to see how this phrase "of very trifling significance" is by inversion (and, I think, at some sacrifice of ease) brought into close neighborhood with the words it contradicts. I cannot get rid of the impression of stiffness from that use of "former" — so unlike the easy usage of good conversation.

Digitized by Google

## XXXIII

### THE AWKWARD SQUAD (II)

I GROUP at the beginning of this chapter a number of repetitions, of one kind or another, which seem to offend against ease. The italics are mine, and will perhaps suffice without particular criticisms.

It was rather *that I th*ought *that I* had carried a burden long enough . . . (Benson.)

. . . our modern Press would *rather appeal* to physical arrogance, or to anything, *rather* than *appeal* to right and wrong. (Chesterton.)

And there are few *of the* members *of the* Academy who do not *individually* use *unhesitatingly* a host of words which they *collectively* have not yet sanctioned. (Matthews.)

They will never hesitate to resort *to the* meanest *of* personalities and *to the* imputing *of the* lowest *of* motives. (Matthews.)

And this recalls the comment of *another* Englishman on *another* witticism made by an *American*, although not characteristically *American*. (Matthews.)



Digitized by Google

It is worth our while to note the evidence as to the states of climate *in* the former geological periods *in* this continent *which may be* derived from the salt deposits *which may be* found at various points within its area. (Shaler.)

It is needless to *follow* the *f*ortune of the *f*ight which *follows*. (Stephen.)

The *progress* of mankind has still been *moving onward*. (J. H. Holmes.)

*Whence* such needs come *from* we do not know. (James.)

In this country one great difficulty in dealing with the matter lies in the fact that there are, not one, but many, reading publics which are *mutually* exclusive of *one another*. (Mabie.)

On the following repetitions I must take space for comment, still using italics.

It is strange what an aggravating effect this state of affairs has *upon* a pedestrian who is bent *upon* riding. (Van Dyke.)

The "effect" of faults small and great is here cumulative. By writing *how much this state of affairs exasperates*, one might do better.

. . . subordinates *made* some arrests which *had better have* been left un*made*. (Morse.)

The "had better have" is in a way idiomatic, but is not a happy combination.

At that moment, before one could have lifted the eyelash to see how *it fell*, a

Needless to say, "it" doesn't refer to the eyelash! With the context before me,

Digitized by Google

well-aimed blow struck the brute beneath the ear. *He fell.* (Mrs. Phelps Ward.)

I did not find any humorous intention in "He fell." I suspect Mrs. Ward did not "take notice."

Everybody had a smile for the preacher's bride, — the boarder on the *rocks*, the fisherman from the *docks*. (Mrs. Phelps Ward.)

Was the rhyme intended? On any theory, or none, I am compelled to think the sentence is badly lacking in ease.

The essential point is this, that we should recognise that *to study* history is *to study* not merely a narrative, but *at the same time* [author's italics] certain theoretical *studies*. (Prof. J. R. Seeley.)

So then, *to study is to study studies*. The greater the distinction of an author, and the wider his influence, the more fitting and needful it is that he should heed what he says.

The discourse was cut short by the sudden appearance of Charley on the stage, with a face and hands of hideous blackness, and a nose like a guttering candle. Why, on that particularly-cleanly afternoon, he *should have discovered* that the chimney-crook and chain from which the hams were suspended *should have possessed* more merits and general interest than any other articles in the house, is a question for nursing mothers to decide. (Hardy.)

I don't find the first sentence perfect ("Charley on the stage"), but it is a very effective bit of description. The second, multitudinously worded, and blemished by awkward repetition, makes an anticlimax. It is what some would call "slipshod" work. And, by the way — if in your reading you meet ten times with the verb *possess*, I estimate that at least nine times out of ten it will have been ill chosen.

Leaving the topic of repetitions, we will consider other forms of awkwardness.

Digitized by Google

I had been one Sunday night down-town, supping and talking with Mr. Abraham Cahan about the "East Side" . . . (Wells.)

Doubtless "with Mr. A. C." modifies both participles. If so, the next prepositional phrase should do the same; but it cannot. Why not put "with Mr. A. C." after "supping"?

The places that were possible for work in the country were few for steady employment.
(Rev. Charles M. Sheldon.)

A misused adjective and a bad arrangement. *The places that were available for steady employment in the country were few* would seem to be much better.

It unlocks emotion, and pours it in free and eloquent forms in an imaginary world. (Woodberry.)

The conception of *pouring emotion* (nowhither) seems crude.

"It is said of the holy Sturme," says an Oxford writer, "that, in passing a horde of unconverted Germans, as they were bathing and gambolling in the stream, he was so overpowered by the intolerable scent which arose from them that he nearly fainted away." National Literature is, in a parallel way, the untutored movement of the reason, imagination, passions, and affections of the natural man, the leapings and the

Digitized by Google

friskings, the plungings and the snortings, the sportings and the buffoonings, the clumsy play and the aimless toil, of the noble, lawless savage of God's intellectual creation. (Newman.)

Recalling Professor Hill's definition of Ease, we may remark that the passage quoted is far from being an "agreeable" story, and the use made of it is in questionable taste.

It was once also so of the legal profession, but it was debauched and prostituted by a few men to commercialism. (Hall.)

The "also so" needs no comment; two kinds of "it", and uncertainty about the syntax of "to", help to make the sentence harder to read than it was to write.

1. The question had arisen as to what reply he should make . . . (Gilder.)

2. . . . told him about just having lost several thousand dollars . . . (Gilder.)

3. At Woodley, his then out-of-town home. (Gilder.)

4. I found him at last sitting on a rough chair under a shelf in the baggage-car, he having given up his seat to a woman. (Gilder.)

1. *A* "question as to" etc. is English. "The" question seems to have been "what reply he

Digitized by Google

should make" — not some query with reference to ("as to") what reply he should make.

2. It doesn't seem to ring true. If the combination *just lost* was to be avoided, surely there was more than one way in which a skilled writer could avoid it.

3. Hardly English. Why not *then his?*

4. The "he having" is another piece of reporters' English (compare "1."), quite in the style of a local paper in the back country. If the writer used the pronoun because he was scrupulous to avoid even a slight formal ambiguity, it was a simple matter to begin a new sentence with *He had.*

The nest-of-boxes style is interesting but not easy. An author whose name has escaped me writes:

> . . . the answer is . . . that that which is to exert the most profound and far-reaching influence upon the future of mankind is that the better self of the Christian Church is beginning to realize that it is through its sin that the social order still ignores divine sonship and human brotherhood.

"Laborious orient ivory, sphere in sphere."

The proposition whose subject is "answer" includes all. The outmost of the remaining

Digitized by Google

spheres is the clause introduced by the first "that." Within this, and next in magnitude, we have the clause beginning with the third "that." Still within and still smaller is the clause that follows "realize." Last of all and at the center, "that the social order still ignores divine sonship and human brotherhood." Logically the first-named clause contains all the rest, and so on down.

"He shall not take advantage of my father's weakness again," he said, "nor shall he use to further his purposes what I have done to reduce him to this want." (Allen.)

The big, crude blue-grass boy who is the hero of "The Reign of Law" was both too much of a boy and too much of a man to talk to himself like a poor little prig. If he had been capable of talking *book* in such a wretched way, he would hardly have deserved the love of Gabriella. Doubtless some features of Mr. Allen's book are due to his deliberate election to write prose poetry; but where is the poetry in that unnatural speech!

It [competitive commerce] makes men who are the gentlest and kindest friends and neighbors, relentless taskmasters in their shops and stores, who will drain

Digitized by Google

the strength of their men and pay their female employees wages on which no girl can live without supplementing them in some way. (Rauschenbusch.)

The comma after "neighbors" is not "agreeable." There are too many *pairs* in the sentence. The relative clauses lack variety. The sentence ends weakly. I venture to suggest: *Of men whose social relations are most gentle and kindly it makes relentless taskmasters in business, who will drain the strength of their men and pay their female help wages on which no girl can live.*

Speaking of pairs — here are two fragments from Swinburne's "The Age of Shakespeare":

. . . an obscure body of feather-headed fanatics, concerning whom we can only be certain that they were decent and inoffensive in comparison with the yelling Yahoos whom the scandalous and senseless license of our day allows to run and roar about the country unmuzzled and unwhipped.

. . . slipshod and straggling metre, incongruous touches or flashes of fanciful or lyrical expression, reckless and awkward inversions, irrational and irrepressible outbreaks of irregular and fitful rhyme.

Elsewhere in the book I find one sentence containing *fourteen* such pairs. This chapter shall close with another of Swinburne's sentences, containing 105 words and broken by one solitary

Digitized by Google

mark of punctuation. Beginning with the principal clause (at "least of all"), I find the sentence breaking up into a series of perhaps ten cadences which march monotonously to the end,

> Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore.

And this is the beginning of the essay on Thomas Heywood. I am reminded of another opening sentence, judiciously brief and impressive: "In the universe of God there are no accidents." So begins Charles Sumner's eulogy on Lincoln.

> If it is difficult to write at all on any subject once ennobled by the notice of Charles Lamb without some apprehensive sense of intrusion and presumption, least of all may we venture without fear of trespass upon ground so consecrated by his peculiar devotion as the spacious if homely province or demesne of the dramatist whose highest honor it is to have earned from the finest of all critics the crowning tribute of a sympathy which would have induced him to advise an intending editor or publisher of the dramatists of the Shakespearean age to begin by a reissue of the works of Heywood.

Digitized by Google

## XXXIV

### FORMALITY AND GOOD FORM

I HAVE said much in favor of good form; if I speak against formality, my words should have the more weight as coming from one who has no use for slovenliness. A style may be laboriously formal and abound in faults; and of these, formality will be among the chief.

How far should the written English of an intelligent and cultivated person differ from the English he uses in conversation? "Writing maketh an exact man." In rapid talk it is impossible to prune and finish sentences after the manner of a careful writer. The attempt is fatal to spontaneity, and forbids that swift give-and-take which is tonic to the wits. The writer, however free rein he may give his invention in the first draft, does wisely to call himself to a strict account in the revision, and take full advantage of an opportunity which the speaker cannot have.



Digitized by Google

But when this is said, our question still confronts us. It may do no harm to express some not quite conventional opinions on the subject.

To begin with, I want to pay my disrespects to the traditional-conventional *We.* Custom, as such, is not sacred even in journalism. If it be possible for the editorial columns of a newspaper to express habitually the views and policy of a responsible staff, then a certain dignity and weight may attach to the plural pronoun. On the other hand, if "we" really means some Horace Greeley with whose vagaries no able and honest corps of newspaper men could long be in real harmony; if anonymous journalism takes refuge behind the pronoun and the establishment to say things that no man would venture to say under his own signature; if the prestige of a great institution is exploited to give a semblance of weight and dignity to views in themselves and in their real authorship contemptible, the "we" is false or cowardly. But you say the "we" is a mere form and deceives nobody. The answer is ready: if it is a mere form, away with it, and get down to facts. But it is not a mere form that deceives nobody. We are "mostly fools", and with our eyes wide open we let ourselves

Digitized by Google

be imposed upon. And what an opportunity this anonymity affords for the domination of the counting-room and the "interests" over the editorial rooms! With his responsible individual personality obscured, regarding himself as a hireling and part of an impersonal machine, the journalist too often becomes cynical and unscrupulous. If all important editorials were signed, something would be gained for honest and conscientious journalism, as well as for ease.

In signed articles and in books, where the authorship resides in an individual really appearing as such, straightforward simplicity and reality are promoted by putting the pronoun in the singular number. Where there is simplicity and genuineness, grace is not far away, and certainly ease is close at hand.

In conversation, in friendly correspondence,[1] and to a considerable extent in public speech, persons of undoubted breeding do not hesitate to use abbreviated forms like *won't* and *doesn't*.

[1] In a short letter from Wendell Phillips, quoted by Colonel Higginson, I note "It's" (It is), "I've", "you'd", and "dont" [*sic*]. Phillips was no clown. Mr. Henry James, writing of his own boyhood, uses "didn't", "doesn't", and "wasn't." I have not cared to make in this book any use of the "Jamesesque", but undoubtedly Mr. James was a gentleman.

Digitized by Google

In conversation, indeed, they are so very much used, and with so much advantage, that excessive scruple about them is a real offense against ease. Bearing in mind that *bookish*, applied to style, rightly conveys disapproval, not to say a mild form of opprobrium, and that *colloquial* may be used in a perfectly good sense, we may inquire whether colloquial forms of expression might not with advantage be more freely used in serious writing. Neither in stiff Sunday clothes nor in stilted phraseology are we at our best and sincerest. They that are plain gentlefolk every day will speak and worship well on set occasions — never fear. It will be an auspicious day for literature of all degrees when women of wit and men of light and leading shall set themselves to write as they talk, in easy and natural style. The elect will not be vulgar, speaking or writing. The vulgar kind, however formal, will "give themselves away."

The writer of stories must report conversation. In general, the more he lets his characters do the talking, the better. Shall he report conversation conventionally, or realistically?

"I met a Mohawk, some years later, who had witnessed the whole affair, from the bed of the stream

Digitized by Google

below, and he told me that the Delaware continued to paddle, in the air, until he was lost in the mists of the falls."

"I know the loss of Mabel would be found heavy to be borne by myself."

So Fenimore Cooper makes Pathfinder speak. If the reader thinks that such a man as Pathfinder could and would have spoken in such ways, I have no controversy with him. If Cooper was incapable of knowing how such a man would have spoken, then he created a character that he did not understand. Mabel Dunham, the sergeant's daughter, is hardly a creation. It should not be difficult to put into her mouth language that such a girl might have used.

"It was perilous and bold," said Mabel; "while looking at it, I could have wished that it had not been attempted, though, now it is over, I can admire its boldness, and the steadiness with which it was made."

"I will not say, Mr. Muir, that compliments on my person are altogether unwelcome, for I should not gain credit for speaking the truth, perhaps," answered Mabel, with spirit, "but I will say that if you would condescend to address to me some remarks of a different nature, I may be led to believe you think I have sufficient faculties to understand them."

Digitized by Google

The market is not glutted with better stories than Cooper's; but we have learned a good deal since his day, and probably no novelist of ability at all comparable with his would now write such stuff as "The procrastination of the catastrophe she now fully expected, though it were only for a moment, afforded a relief," or speak through the lips of backwoods characters in a labored style like his. But probably, also, for some time yet Hamlet's doctrine of holding the mirror up to nature will need to be preached with faithful application to the literary form (fiction) now predominant.

In reporting colloquialisms, dialect, or slang, we should expect a writer like Cooper to be conventional rather than accurate, and to display no great skill. He carefully puts two apostrophes in "v'y'ge", but has "ag'in" for *against*. For *fawn*, he gives us both "fa'n" and "fa'an." For *knowed*, which of course is dialectically right, he prints "know'd." Without any apparent reason, he spells *ye* "yee."

The Biglow Papers are rich enough in inconsistencies, which may generally be accounted for (doubtfully, I think) by attributing them to Hosea. Because the case is not clear against Lowell, I refrain from quoting.

Digitized by Google

I see that Mr. Hewlett gives for a dialect form "by'n by." Two apostrophes or none. Mrs. Slosson has "gran'sir" (possibly omitting the second apostrophe on the theory that there is a word *grandsir*), but "natur'" and "pictur'." In "it's bein' thought likely", an apostrophe is wrongly inserted in the pronoun form. In "I most died", she omits the apostrophe; but it seems to me that the dictionary is very liberal in giving *most*, in the sense of *almost*, even in fine print and as "colloquial." "Oh, if I could only a seen her!" shows *have* clipped at both ends, with no apostrophe. "Oh deary, deary, me that's what they meant" may be "blamed on" the proof-reader. Over against "'round" and "'mongst", put "bust open."

Another well-known writer of dialect, Mrs. Hegan Rice, has "twic't", where *twicet* would *spell* the word and perfectly represent it. "I bate [bet] yer" is something that I suspect the author never heard. Elsewhere she prints "I bate ye", which sounds "nateral." Instead of *listenin'* (properly pronounced *lisnin*) which shows exactly what an illiterate person says, she gives "list'nin'." I have heard a great deal of dialect speech, but I suppose I never heard and never

Digitized by Google

shall hear "list'nin'." Mrs. Rice, too, has "bust", without the apostrophe. "I didn't foller him", pronounced as spelled, is bad dialect; for if the *r* were sounded, the *h* would certainly be silent. Mrs. Rice's "agin" may be compared with her "ag'in reason", and both with her "b'ilin'."

The excellence of a dialect story is not in "bad spelling", but, partly, in good spelling — that is, in spelling that accurately and consistently indicates the pronunciation of the speakers quoted; and so far as regular spelling will serve this purpose, it should of course be used.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# FORCE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

## XXXV

### GOOD THEORY

It is a great comfort not to be writing a text-book; for I don't believe a good writer was ever made yet by painful pedagogy, and I have happy knowledge of the potency of a pregnant hint, a point of view suggested, an illuminative *obiter dictum*. He that doesn't care will never learn to write; and he that cares will "take suggestion as a cat laps milk."

Yet it will be well to know exactly what the term Force means for us, here and now. Force, then, is the quality that makes language effective — effective to please, to instruct, to convince, to persuade, to do whatsoever the user of language would have it do. Force is the masterful quality that commands attention.

Yes, effectiveness may be due to other qualities of style; and here we see again how the good qualities are interrelated and in a way insepa-



Digitized by Google

rable. But a sentence or a discourse may have the other good qualities (and therefore be effective) and yet be deficient in this which differs from them all. Its effectiveness will, then, fall short of the maximum. Again, the other qualities may be more or less lacking, yet what is said may be so forcible as to produce great effect, though never the greatest.

A weak and spiritless person, without conviction or passion, will not achieve a forcible style; whole-hearted faith, imperious will, intensity of feeling, powerful imagination will find effective expression inevitably. But here we have to do with the literary form, which can by the plain common writer be more or less determined while the ink flows; and no writer's force of character is so great, or spirit so Damascus-tempered, but that he must needs take thought of every-day craftsmanship if he would do his best.

In the old days of "Natural Philosophy", *striking force* was said to vary directly as the square of the velocity. Tediousness is the unpardonable offense. Sweeping formulas, like proverbs, may be of great use as summing up in small compass the gist of many sound judgments.

Digitized by Google

Hold fast to the rule — the exceptions will generally take care of themselves. Another formula against the tedious style is that *Force varies inversely with the number of words.* We naturally think of tediousness as a quality of paragraphs; still more, of chapters, and of the discourse as a whole. But he that avoids weakness in his sentences will hardly be dull and tiresome in the larger units. Hence these coming chapters need not be made tedious by long extracts.

If the writer's aim is simply to give pleasure, evidently whatever is disagreeable will not be effective for his purpose; unless, of course, it serves some ulterior end, as the woes of the heroine may enhance the interest of the plot and the satisfaction of the "lived happy ever after." In the detail of composition, most of the disagreeable things serve no good purpose whatever. One may intend to give pain, as in describing the horrors of cruelty to awaken sympathy and moral indignation, or in holding the mirror up to the reader's baser nature to make him ashamed of himself. Here, again, whatever is needlessly distasteful or distracting or obstructive will in one way or another tend to lessen the writer's power over him who reads. When Nathan said

Digitized by Google

unto David *Thou art the man*, if he was wise he did not say it "through his nose", or make his speech raucous, snarling, and contemptible. The less faulty his utterance, the more effective. The purer his tone, the more penetrating.

Many things of which most writers take little account are disagreeable, distracting, obstructive. The sensitive and critical reader knows them at sight, is consciously annoyed and impeded by them. Upon the mind not finely constituted and trained, they may have a like effect, even when the reader could give no intelligent account of it. Whatever I set myself to accomplish, in whatever sphere of activity, I must go straightforwardly at it, avoiding all waste, all irrelevancy and awkwardness, if I am to succeed best at least expense. Tools that are clean, well-shapen, sharp, and handled according to the principles of "scientific management" will do effective work. Nothing less fit will measure up to requirements under modern "service conditions."

This introductory chapter may close with two forcible sentences, which happen to lie before me.

About noon we had another rain-storm with keen startling thunder, the metallic ringing, clashing, clang-

Digitized by Google

ing notes gradually fading into a low bass rolling and muttering in the distance. (Muir.)

But Lincoln was always a-making; he would have died unfinished if the terrible storms of the war had not stung him to learn in those four years what no other twenty could have taught him. (Wilson.)

Digitized by Google

## XXXVI

### BAD PRACTICE

If you would have your way with me, pray give me something, if possible, that I can like. A good way to find out whether or not a sentence is likable is to find out whether you really like it yourself.

> If the rich had only what they earned,
> And the poor had all that they earned,
> All wheels would revolve more slowly
> And life would be more sane.

If the above were printed as prose, it would be proper to attach to it Dr. Rauschenbusch's name. I remember a "great reader" whose critical approval was expressed by "Strong; very strong!" Such commendation would be worth more if it were more discriminating; but such as it is, it could hardly be applied to the sentence with which I have taken liberties. This sentence is neither verse nor prose. A little time and thought



Digitized by Google

given to rewriting would easily transform it into one worthy of the thought expressed.

He can say, in the words of Dunoyer, "*Je n'impose rien, je ne propose même rien: j'expose,*" I offer neither impositions nor propositions, but expositions.

(Hadley.)

Better sacrifice something else, *n'est-ce pas?* than throw away the strength and neatness of the original in a vain attempt to imitate it.

Probably most writers, if not all, need to be vigilant lest they fall into small mannerisms that weaken their style. The use of *when* in the sense of *and then* need not be utterly condemned, but one soon gets enough of it. At his best, Mr. Burroughs writes so well that one wishes he would stay at his best.

You are rambling on the mountain, accompanied by your dog, when you are startled . . .

[Next sentence] You speak to him sharply, when he bristles up . . .

When about halfway I accidentally made a slight noise, when the bird flew up . . .

Would he *talk* in that way? The two uses of *when* in the third sentence go ill together.

A phrase, a word, or a syllable gets itself awk-

Digitized by Google

wardly repeated with a weak and childish effect. It pays to *read over* what one has written.

One side of the sideboard and part of the side wall of the room were on fire and these were extinguished.

*Extinguishing side* of *side* and part of *side* is good, in more ways than one. I wonder what "these" really means.

We insist that men should not mistake, as they are prone to mistake, this natural taste for the bathos for a relish for the sublime. (Arnold.)

A lover of Arnold's style can forgive his mannerisms; but this weak rhythmical heedless jog-trot is too bad. Can it be that he would have defended it?

To have as traveling companion a commentator as penetrating as Harriet Martineau, had the quick reward . . . (Brooks.)

The middle "as" might well be *so*. "To have" is not a good subject for "had." One is rewarded for doing rather than for having.

. . . the reception of doctrine, as, and so far as, it is met and apprehended by the mind, which will be differently, as he considers, in different persons, in the shape of orthodoxy in one, heterodoxy in another. (Newman.)

Repetition and straddle are not the only faults. To what does "which" relate? What is the construction of "differently"? And of "in the shape"? Is it necessary to drag the sentence out monotonously, and cut it up tiresomely with commas?

The First Epistle of St. Peter commends itself as much, one may say, as the genuine work of the author whose name it bears, as the Second Epistle bespeaks itself the contrary. (Arnold.)

Of course Matthew Arnold had the literary skill to compare these two epistles with respect to internal evidence of genuineness, expressing his opinion exactly in a good and forcible English sentence.

Digitized by Google

There is probably no country [*sic*] where new inventions . . . are as readily welcomed and as quickly taken up as in America. (Van Dyke.)

Why omit the *other*? And why perpetrate the feminism, when *so readily* and *so quickly* would have been euphonious, forcible, exactly right?

Indeed, English is quite as well qualified to serve as a world-language as Latin or as French. (Matthews.)

There seems to have been at least some temporary lack of *studium* (here *interest, attention*) *et aures*.

Now that we have thoroughly suffered this Jackson change and it is over, we are ready to recognize it as quite as radically American as anything in all our history. (Wilson.)

If I were composing an Epistle to a Young Person Looking Forward to a Literary Career, I would bid him ever strive to winnow out the Pestiferous little Particle AS.

Ill-constructed sentences are like an ill-groomed and shambling salesman — they are handicapped in "getting results."

Bob Wren, a quarterback whose feats rivaled those of Dean's. (Roosevelt.)

Those of Dean's quarterback? Nay, I know my man too well to think so.

. . . and perhaps no great national sorrow was ever more nobly preserved in song than was accomplished in the "Hymn in time of Famine" in Ireland. (Higginson.)

Good words, until the comparison has to come — then the sentence ignominiously breaks down. The safeguard against such weakness is plain hard work.

What difference does it make if we have chattel

Misuse of "if", followed by its correct use. Needless

Digitized by Google

slavery or not, if masters and slaves are the same kind of individuals under conditions of freedom as under conditions of bondage?

But, such as he is, he is (and posterity too, I am quite sure, will say this), in the European poetry of that quarter of a century which follows the death of Goethe, incomparably the most important figure. (Arnold.)

multiplication of words added to the ill effect of provincialism in diction. A brief, pointed *statement* would be effective.

The funny jingle at the beginning is too much for the dignity of the sentence. A sonorous close hardly undoes the mischief. Good counsel for great and small: If your sentence is weak, tear it down and rebuild it.

## Too many *thats* spoil the broth.

. . . that, though he was endlessly kind and absolutely faithful, yet that few made any vital difference to him. (Benson.)

Benson has the same thing elsewhere. The reading public ought to hold a deliberate essayist to a high standard of finish.

. . . and perhaps that was why . . . that he instantly assumed . . . (Black.)

A worthy country schoolmaster: "I told him what that I thought about it."

. . . did not notice how that the cold blue light . . . was gradually yielding to a silver-gray. (Black.)

Of "what that", "why that", and "how that", perhaps the last is the least bad; but it is not good.

We must warn ourselves against the old misconception of salvation, that assumes that if only we have faith we do not need to lay very much stress upon being good. (Coe.)

The comma after "salvation" prepares the way for the relative *which;* and there seems to be no sufficient reason for not using it. There is reason, here, for not using "that."

Digitized by Google

## In general, *which* gets more than its due.

. . . not far from the spot which was destined to witness the terrible tragedy which was at once to darken and glorify the life of . . . Charles Lamb. (Birrell.)

Not only too much of "which", but too much of "which was." Birrell could easily have made a better compacted sentence. Clever writers should write cleverly.

. . . which richly deserve the kind of punishment which this great humorist administered. (Brooks.)

One "which" taken away would add idiomatic ease and force. And "which richly" is not good.

. . . the power which was moving his son, and which was part of the religious revival which swept Europe. (Miss Addams.)

Too busy? Get a private secretary. Almost every book one reads could have been greatly improved by a few plodding day's-works.

. . . figures which possess, above all, that winning attractiveness which there is no man but would willingly exercise, and which resemble those works of art which, though not meant to be very great or imposing, are yet wrought of the choicest material. (Pater.)

Not only the weak repetition (one, two, three, four) of an unpleasant word, but an inelegant parallelism of structure between the two overloaded complex relative clauses connected by "and." I seem to recall a phrase, "the comely decadence of Pater." This isn't comely.

Dick trotted behind with what was intended to be a look of composure, but which was, in fact, a rather silly expression of feature . . . (Hardy.)

The pronoun "what" is both antecedent and relative. As relative it is properly subject of the two verbs that follow it; and "which" is an intruder. "Slipshod."

Digitized by Google

"Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh." The flesh of the makers of books seems to shrink from the weariness of patient revision. Why not make of it a pastime? "Brainy" men will work their brains hard in playing whist, and consider it recreation. Revision of literary detail makes sufficient demand upon the wits to be very interesting, without the severer strain of creation or large construction. Horace does not seem to have thought the *labor limae*, at least in poetry, too humble for a man of genius. If prose is worth while, it is worth while to finish it. Of course if the author does not care to finish his own work, it may be made very decent by a "hired hand", at so much an hour.

Digitized by Google

## XXXVII

### LINE UPON LINE, PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT

"MUST give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison." Possibly the good old orthodox advice has been a trifle one-sided. Read the best, I would rather say, for refreshment, invigoration, discipline, inspiration, sweetness, and light — never mind about "models." When the Bible and Shakespere have come to be a part of you, when it has become natural to think in terms of "the best that has been thought and said in the world", it may be that you will have something of your own that needs to be said. If so, say it in your own way, *as well as you can.* Then set your masterpiece aside to cool. In due time attack it with your critical faculties and by cheerful hard work make the medium fit to convey the message.

But in these pages we are letting some very considerable writers (and others) show us how



Digitized by Google

not to write. Is this a bad use to make of our good friends? If I like my favorites less for reading them with discrimination, so be it. I am quite content to prove all things and hold fast that which is good. Reading in this spirit, I keep finding passages which, tested for force, are not up to standard.

> . . . they felt falsely guilty for their omissions, as if they really had been duties to art and history which must be discharged . . . (Howells.)

An over-particular person might object to the purposeless alliteration. Then he would be held up by the question whether Mr. H. in his dissection of middle-class consciousness really discriminates a feeling of *false guilt*. One may feel guilty and think he is innocent, perhaps; but to speak of feeling "falsely guilty" seems like a contradiction of terms. Perhaps, however, Mr. Howells can feel that way. Again, whatever the dictionary may say, identification of "omissions" with "duties" here puts a strain on language.

It may be said that Howells does not choose to write in a forcible style. Certainly he does not affect the sledge-hammer method; but is weak-

Digitized by Google

ness his aim? It may be *lèse-majesté* to say this, but I believe a great deal of the dissatisfaction undoubtedly felt with his later novels is due to their weakness. Working under his peculiar theory of realism, he sometimes employs his great gifts and trained powers in doing what many of us believe is not worth doing. We are more or less entertained while he anatomizes not "Regan" — that might be worth while — but, say, a thin-blooded literary man and his rather silly wife; but there is no virile compulsive force in the work — it does not grip us. To change the figure, it is not tonic. Now if a single sentence, instead of driving home in vigorous fashion a thought clearly conceived and pointedly expressed, as well as worth expressing, gives occasion for scattering one's wits in queries that come at nothing either wise or witty, that sentence is not effective; it is weak. And sentences are the stuff that books are made of.[1]

Right Reason . . . leads the mind to the Catholic Faith, and plants it there, and teaches it in its religious speculations to act under its guidance. (Newman.)

[1] Speaking of realism — I was pleased with this sentence in Aldrich's Ponkapog Papers: "The art of the realistic novelist sometimes seems akin to that of the Chinese tailor who perpetuated the old patch on the new trousers."

Digitized by Google

If "the Catholic Faith" were a place, like Rome, the adverb "there" might be justified by usage. The middle part of the sentence is harshly consonantal, and the pronouns are not well handled. I have a theory that Newman was an artist in spite of himself. His gift came from no evil source; he might have acknowledged it thankfully and cherished it devoutly.

No one can say that this multitude of observers is not in earnest, nor their work honest, nor their methods competent. (Drummond.)

This sentence is effective, but in the wrong direction. It is exasperating. Dealing in a mechanical fashion with the word "nor", equivalent to *and not*, we might say *and their work is not honest, and their methods are not competent.* This interpretation would construe the sentence as logical; but it probably misrepresents Drummond's meaning, which I take to be *nor that their work is not honest, nor that their methods are not competent.* When we have reached this conclusion, we haven't gone far towards being impressed with the soundness and weight of Drummond's teaching. "He was not writing," you say, "for gerund-grinders and pedants. The serious reader

Digitized by Google

understands him well enough, and goes on." I don't mind your calling names, my dear objector; but the undisciplined thinkers for whom "any old" form of statement will be "well enough" are not the ones in whose minds the seeds of truth germinate to good purpose. They cannot be taken seriously *as thinkers*. It may be that the qualities which gave Drummond a great but short-lived popularity prevented the serious recognition that his work deserved. Am I snobbish? I want the men and women of the great Democracy to do their indispensable part in the world's thinking. To that end I would have them know something of right thinking by knowing something of "the form of sound words."

> . . . but what is our dogmatic theology, except mis-attribution to the Bible . . . of a science and an abstruse metaphysic which is not there, because our theologians have in themselves a faculty for science, for it makes one-eighth of them? (Arnold.)

No wonder if lesser men break forth in babble! A causal clause is naturally construed not with a noun but with a verb; and this causal clause is put with a verb, instead of the noun that Arnold would have it modify. Then the "for" clause, which looks as if it were lugged in for the

Digitized by Google

sake of the mannerism, adds to the chaos. I suppose, moreover, that the preposition "except" is not well chosen.

But in these old-fashioned, affectionate letters, transmitted often, in those troublous times, with so much difficulty, we have what is almost as graphic — a numerous group, in which, although so many of Browne's children died young, he was happy; with Dorothy Browne, occasionally adding her charming, ill-spelt postscripts to her husband's letters; the religious daughter who goes to daily prayers after the Restoration, which brought Browne the honour of knighthood; and, above all, two Toms, son and grandson of Sir Thomas, the latter being the son of Dr. Edward Browne, now become distinguished as a physician in London (who attended John, earl of Rochester, in his last illness at Woodstock) and his childish existence as he lives away from his proper home in London, in the old house at Norwich, two hundred years ago, we see like a thing of to-day. (Pater.)

If such a tremendous sentence were perfectly clear, and perfectly normal in its structure, there might be some chance that it would be effective with sane readers. Let us dismiss it as rubbish. That Pater could write real and effective English, the following extract proves:

The spiritual body had anticipated the formal moment of death; the alert soul, in that tardy decay,

Digitized by Google

changing its vesture gradually, and as if piece by piece. The infinite future had invaded this life perceptibly to the senses, like the ocean felt far inland up a tidal river.

Referring to the decline of life, I have a sentence from Aldrich, strongly contrasting with Pater's, but perfect, I think, in its way:

To keep the heart unwrinkled, to be hopeful, kindly, cheerful, reverent — that is to triumph over old age.

Here are some specimens to which the reader may attach his own label:

But a religion of experience, if such be possible, would be a no less glorious vindication of the truth than exposure of error. (Coe.)

The meaning might be more felicitously expressed: . . . *would vindicate the truth no less gloriously than it would expose error.*

When a growing and daring mind puts his hand to a great work. . . . . (Rauschenbusch.)

When *a mind puts his hand* somewhere, things are mixed, and the mixture is weak.

. . . she would have liked to have lain down . . . and lose herself in the forgetfulness of an eternal sleep. (Churchill.)

He that would have his way with the discerning reader should write with proper respect for his intelligence and good taste.

The gifted singer can be had for an evening, the entertainment of kings can be

What kind of a thing is "the reflected importance upon the entertainer", and

Digitized by Google

| | |
|---|---|
| reached with the reflected importance upon the entertainer. (Hall.) | how can "the entertainment of kings" be reached with it? |
| . . . a characteristic which neither of the listeners shared, and scarcely understood. (Margaret Deland.) | "Effective" — but in the wrong way. One wonders how so good a writer can do so ill! |
| It brought a serious joy into her eyes, which he noticed as they sat side by side in the prayer meeting, singing from the same book, or standing together in prayer. (Deland.) | So they "sat side by side" "standing together in prayer"! Surely the style would be invigorated by making the members of the sentence stand together in some logical relation. |
| . . . it lay on Colonel Sapt to secure security as to the King ever having been in need of rescue. (Anthony Hope.) | Possibly "lay on" is good; certainly "secure security" is bad; the ear of at least one reader is displeased by "King" for *King's*. |
| . . . we got everything ready — including additions to the pigskin library, which included . . . (Roosevelt.) | More strenuous work in the writing would have made the sentence clearer, neater, and less weak. |
| We are gravely requested to have no opinion, or, having one, to suppress it, on the one topic that has occupied caucuses, newspapers, and Congress for the last dozen years, lest we endanger the safety of the Union. (Lowell.) | The sentence might be made far more forcible by putting it:<br>On the one topic . . . dozen years, we are gravely requested to have no opinion, or, having one, to suppress it, lest we endanger the safety of the Union. |

Mr. Bliss Perry speaks of "a time like ours, when everybody writes 'well enough', and few

Digitized by Google

try to write perfectly." Ay, there's the rub. Let every writer try to write perfectly, instead of cynically or indolently or mercenarily giving us what is "well enough" for his immediate purpose, and we shall have not only better literature, but better men and women.

Digitized by Google

# XXXVIII

## HERE A LITTLE AND THERE A LITTLE

It is not always easy to make a neat and logical classification of weaknesses. In every-day life they come unclassified, each to be suffered or dealt with as it occurs. I group here some extracts each of which I had marked "Cut it" — a very good mark to put upon one's own work, as well as the other man's. Aldrich says: "They [his characters] *will* talk, and I have to let them; but when the story is finished, I go over the dialogue and strike out four fifths of the long speeches." (Good, though it might be clearer.)

There is need of a clearing up of our notion of what constitutes a moral life. (Coe.)

*We need to clear up our notion.* Cutting out abstract and verbal nouns, we don't lose much.

Paul held no anti-slavery meetings, and Peter made no public protest against the organized grafting in the

Why not *against organized graft in Roman tax-farming? Of course not* would have been enough, and would have



Digitized by Google

Roman system of tax-farming. Of course they did not. (Rauschenbusch.)

He proposed numerous strategic movements to be made upon the logs, whereby they would move more swiftly than usual. (Mrs. Riggs.)

. . . to cross the space of clouded light beyond, and gain the darkness of the ilex avenue beyond. (Mrs. Humphry Ward.)

The justification of consciousness is the having of it. (Royce.)

If most of the people at the North had not had heads more cool and sensible than the one which rested upon the shoulders of the ardent "Ben" Wade, the alarming prediction of that lively spokesman might have been fulfilled. (Morse.)

Very much more than is the case with other men, Lincoln meant different things to different persons . . . (Morse.)

minimized the lack of harmony in form between the two sentences.

I will not quarrel with the first five words, if for the rest I may write *to make the logs move faster.*

Surely one "beyond" might have been spared. If not, then *that* might have been added to bolster up the second.

"Doin' of it" and "hevin' on't" belong to the rustic dialect.

Mr. Morse was perhaps thinking of Kent's snappy speech in Lear, Act II, Sc. 2; but he has not improved upon it, or improved his sentence by spinning it out to a feeble tenuity. His forty words might be cut to exactly twenty.

The unnecessary words "is the case with" serve only, I think, to weaken and blemish a good sentence.

There would be a considerable economy of time, and more force but perhaps less fun, if

Digitized by Google

saying a thing once might suffice. I read in the *Outlook* of "a class to meet at 4 P.M. on Sunday afternoons", and in the Chicago *Tribune* that "The great field Marshal von Moltke was famous for his taciturnity and for the rarity of his words." Mr. Cooper, writer on "Craftsmanship", deals with the question "Just precisely what literary form is the best possible form." Mr. Chesterton says, "We do it by definitely defining his rights."

Notwithstanding Professor Lounsbury's views, probably many of Pater's readers are so obsessed with etymology that when he writes, "we watch to the end for the traces where the nobler hand has glanced along, leaving its vestiges, as if accidentally or wastefully, in the rising of the style," they may be tempted to think irreverently of the *footprints* of a *hand* in the rising of a style. The following deserves to be in a paragraph by itself:

"The conclusion of the whole matter," therefore, is that the social factor is the essential factor in the problem of individual redemption. With this unsolved, nothing else will for a single moment avail. With this conquered everything else is easy. This is the strategic point to be assailed . . . This is the "nearest duty" . . . (J. H. Holmes.)

Digitized by Google

Being in hearty sympathy with this progressive preacher's zeal for social welfare, I should be sorry to misunderstand him; but one smiles at a "factor" to be *solved* and "conquered", which is a "strategic point" and a "duty" — and that is what he seems to mean.

There is a gentleman in Philadelphia who writes for innumerable Ladies. Under the caption "Style in Writing", he says:

> The man who thinks more about style than what he has to say never succeeds; never reaches an audience that is always waiting for a man who knows something which the world wants to hear and is worth hearing.

So full of "what he has to say", and so nobly negligent of style, he has left something for the reader to puzzle over. What is the subject of "is worth hearing"? If it be "who", his sentence is grammatical, but unfortunately worded. If "which" is the subject, it is too hard-worked; being also *object* of "hear." Another relative (*who* or *which* according to the meaning intended), standing as subject of "is worth hearing", would make the sentence do its work; but there are too many relatives already. After "audience", *which* might properly take the place of the nat-

Digitized by Google

urally restrictive "that"; and then the way would be opened for further changes in the direction of clearness and ease. But the sentence, so exemplarily weak, should stand unaltered.

Some one, whose name I have lost, says that "her eyes had flown so straightly homeward to his." This is probably not the only instance in literature in which eyes have taken to themselves wings; but I quote the clause on account of the superlative and exquisite weakness of that *pantaletted* adverb "straightly."

Mr. Burroughs says "you hurl a stone at a chipmunk." It is mean enough to *throw* a stone at the "pretty little imp", as "Oom John" calls him. What man or boy, with his feet on the earth, would "hurl" one! No, our friend was writing for the Press — hence, I suppose, this weakness. Here is some more from the same source:

> He [the dog] seemed to say to himself, on seeing us, "There come both of them now, just as I have been hoping they would; now, while they are away, I will run quickly over and know what they have got that a dog can eat."

That isn't dog-talk! It is poor weak book-talk.

> My companion saw the dog get up on our arrival, and go quickly in the direction of our camp, and he

Digitized by Google

said something in the cur's manner suggested to him the object of his departure. . . . On cautiously nearing the camp, the dog was seen amid [*sic*] the pails in the shallow water of the creek investigating them.

That was written by a man (Mr. Burroughs) who is capable of writing good forcible English; but compare it with the language in which millions of plain Americans would tell the story, and see how feeble the printed English looks by contrast! In spite of the makers of books, the plain people speak with directness and vigor.

The naturalist and his friend were camping and fishing. Here is a fragment of their conversation (as reported):

"'The last that parleys with the setting sun,'" said I, quoting Wordsworth.

"That line is almost Shakespearean," said my companion. "It suggests that great hand, at least, though it has not the grit and virility of the more primitive bard. What triumph and fresh morning power in Shakespeare's lines that will occur to us at sunrise to-morrow! —

"'and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops,'

" or in this: —"

And so on. That record is conventional. It is out of harmony with the situation. It is weak.

Digitized by Google

I cannot think real men talk so in the woods; although there is no better place to talk of the poets.

It is but fair, in this connection, to quote some very different passages, in which the same writer speaks directly and forcibly to the reader.

The woods are rigid and tense, keyed up by the frost, and resound like a stringed instrument.

At night I hear more distinctly the roar of the North Mountain. In summer it is a sort of complacent purr, as the breezes stroke down its sides; but in winter always the same low, sullen growl.

When the nights are calm and the moon full, I go out to gaze upon the wonderful purity of the moonlight and the snow. The air is full of latent fire, and the cold warms me. . . .

The world lies about me in a "trance of snow." The clouds are pearly and iridescent . . . the ghosts of clouds, the indwelling beauty freed from all dross.

Presently a fox barks, away up next the mountain. . . . As I listen, one answers him from behind the woods in the valley. What a wild winter sound, wild and weird, up among the ghostly hills!

And as the hermit's evening song goes up from the deep solitude below me, I experience that serene exaltation of sentiment of which music, literature, and religion are but the faint types and symbols.

Here the naturalist is also poet; and the language is well within the proprieties of imaginative

Digitized by Google

literature. I could not find very much fault with it. In the last passage, "religion" seems to mean *religious ceremonial*, or *ritual*. I suppose that religion in a more proper sense *is* the highest possible "exaltation of sentiment."

There are a number of passages in my collection which I have found it convenient to label "Wordy." To such as these, especially, our formula of inverse ratio will apply.

One can feel sure that Franklin would have succeeded in any part of the national life that it might have fallen to his lot to take part in. (Wilson.)

Not extremely weak, but certainly not forcible. The use of "take part in", following "in any part", adds to the effect of weakness; *take part in any part* is bad.

. . . because he knew so well what he was about [Good, so far!] — and knew also that he was succeeding in expressing his thoughts a little better than they could have been expressed in any other and more conventional way. (Cooper.)

Not very weak, again; but too weak for exemplary "craftsmanship." It is not for me to rewrite the part that follows the dash, but I am very sure the author could easily have made it much briefer and better.

We must each of us find our own best working hours, must decide for ourselves whether we will sit thirty hours at a stretch without moving, and then do nothing more for a week, or whether we will accept the monotony

*Whether or whether*, with an extra *whether* thrown in, is too much. It is fair to inquire whether any net loss would result if the whole were condensed:

Each must decide for himself whether to sit thirty

Digitized by Google

of systematic daily effort from breakfast until luncheon, day in and day out, whether we feel like it or not. (Cooper.)

hours at a stretch, and then do nothing for a week, or to work regularly, resolutely, day after day.

Both are cosmic processes; both are ethical processes; both are both cosmic and ethical processes. (Drummond.)

In the first two statements, all is said. Why not bury the rest, with the epitaph *Cui Bono?*

It is difficult to secure a successful organization of men into the simplest trades organization without an appeal to the most abstract principles. (Miss Addams.)

Does this mean anything more than that *it is hard to effect the simplest trades organization*, etc.? If so, there is an easy and forcible way to express the meaning.

Miss Cobbe . . . herself sets vigorously about a positive reconstruction of religion, about making a religion of the future out of hand, or at least setting about making it. (Arnold.)

I take it Arnold means to be humorous here, as well as gently satirical. I think he succeeds in overdoing his own style, and making it weak.

And further, the comprehension of the bearings of one science on another, and the use of each to each, and the location and limitation and adjustment and due appreciation of them all, one with another, this belongs, I conceive, to a sort of science distinct from all of them, and in some sense a science of sciences, which is my own conception of what is meant by Philosophy, in the true sense of the word, and of a philosophical habit of mind, and which in these discourses I shall call by that name. (Newman.)

Digitized by Google

A sentence so long and wordy as this, if used at all, should be worked out patiently to perfection of form, to lucidity, to logical correctness. Because it is not so wrought out, this sentence is lacking in both ease and force. Note that "a science of sciences" is said to be a "conception of what is meant by Philosophy . . . and of a philosophical habit of mind." How "science of sciences" can be "a conception" of two things so different as "philosophy" (which he evidently means is *scientia scientiarum*) and "a philosophical habit of mind" (which is not a science at all), is too hard a question for me. The reference in "that name" is not hard to determine; but the demonstrative is so used as to violate the principle of formal clearness. Why could he not have said, *which in these discourses I shall call Philosophy*?

Digitized by Google

## XXXIX

### THE LARGER UNIT

ONE sentence after another. Every writing, from the little article or essay to the great history in many volumes, is a sequence of sentences, grouped as they may be into paragraphs, chapters, and so on. He that in the sentence has achieved correctness, clearness, ease, and force has gone far towards achieving the same qualities in the larger unit. It costs more arduous effort to make sure that the parts of the whole work are logically related and connected; that the whole course of thought is made as easy as in the nature of the case it can be, and as agreeable as lightness of touch, pleasing variety, apt illustration, and skilful grouping and adaptation of parts can make it; that the effectiveness of the whole is raised to the highest power by brevity, directness, rigid exclusion of all that does not contribute to the effect sought for, and judicious arrangement of



Digitized by Google

the parts with a view to climax in interest, in illumination of the subject, and in impressiveness. All this, I say, is harder work than tinkering sentences; but the same principles apply to it, and a master of sentences who is consistent with himself and has the necessary strength of mind will be master all along the line. This book makes no attempt to deal systematically with large questions of construction. Yet a few *obiter dicta* may not be without use.

It was Margaret Fuller, perhaps, that spoke of reading with one's fingers. "Rip open the leaves of a book," said the old "Prexy", "and get the heart out of it!" Scholars and specialists must often treat books in this way; sometimes because they are not real books but works of reference, sometimes because they are not worth reading through, sometimes for other and special reasons. But who that writes with serious purpose or in a spirit of craftsmanship would be content to have his book squeezed dry (to change the figure) by the general reader and flung away! The real books will bear reading through; the books that grip the reader will not let go until the last leaf be turned; the great ones will get themselves read over and over again.

Digitized by Google

The day of ponderous learned folios and of interminable stories has gone by; but publishers, I suppose, do not look with favor upon small books, unless, perhaps, they will bear expanding with half-tones, thick paper, leads, large type, and blank leaves to the dimensions and pretensions that warrant certain customary prices. It ought to come about, somehow, that no writer should be under any external temptation or constraint to stretch his work out thin. Force rather than fulness should be the peremptory demand of the reading public. There are subjects, of course, which cannot be adequately treated without generous space; but in the great majority of cases the public may fairly ask for the results of special studies rather than the tedious process; for salient facts, principles, conclusions established by elimination; for clear and forcible reasoning, exposition, or whatever, dealing with no more material than can be handled by the reader with reasonable expenditure of time and strength. Where one reader skilfully tears out the heart of a book, twenty read superficially. With books written as they should be, the excuse for dissipating one's energies in cursory reading would largely disappear.

Digitized by Google

The enormous intellectual appetite of a Gladstone or a Macaulay is the rare exception. It belonged, moreover, to an earlier day, to a time before the swift changes of the last half-century had been accomplished and the field of knowledge had perforce been minutely divided among specialists. The American mind, probably, is less adapted than the British to omnivorous scholarship, and must and will do its work with greater concentration and a lighter touch. And it is interesting to reflect how little mark a man like Gladstone has made as a writer. Already — who reads a page of Gladstone?

We may well doubt whether there is any great future for the long and leisurely novel of which the past has given us so many examples. Dickens wears well, but it is, I believe, in spite of his verbal exuberance. Writers like Miss Murfree, inspired by the incommunicable and inexpressible beauty of natural scenery, toil to carry the reader with them in their long descriptions. If their fiction be as powerful as hers, the reader toils too — or skips. If a writer would take the reader by his buttonhole, or hold him as the Ancient Mariner holds the Wedding Guest, the essay form is available, in which the inclusive

Digitized by Google

unit is happily restricted and the direct personal method may be taken as a matter of course. In the novel, description or discursive talk should be severely held to its proper limits and subordination. As in the drama, so here, what the characters say and do is what counts. In one of Donald G. Mitchell's books there is a description of a summer thunder-storm. As the black cloud rises in the west, the vertical lightning-flashes are compared to swift-working golden ropes raising it to the zenith, and the thunder to the rumble of the pulleys. It matters not whether the simile is as good as it seemed to me now many years ago; it served its purpose, and lodged itself permanently in my memory. If hard work or happy inspiration can with a few irresistible words master the reader's imagination, so that he reads the truth as "by flashes of lightning", description is doing its perfect work. If the play of Holmes's wit, or a quick glow as of Lowell's humor can illuminate a story without retarding it, the reader's patience is not tried — his sympathy is won.

Speaking of fiction: its effectiveness depends largely upon the illusion produced. The reader cannot in the full sense believe that which he knows is not true, but if the probabilities and

Digitized by Google

possibilities are not too much disregarded he can *feel* as if it were true. In Mr. Crawford's "Paul Patoff", the story is told by one of the characters in it — Paul Griggs. Part of it has to do with events in which he was an actor, or at least was present to see and hear for himself; part of the narrative tells of things which in their full detail Griggs could not have known. Whatever may be gained by this method, I believe much is lost. So in "The Old Curiosity Shop" the first three chapters are supposed to be written from first-hand knowledge by "an old man" who himself makes the acquaintance of the leading characters and introduces them to the reader; then, announcing the change, he continues the story without any pretence of having been able to know in his own person the details which he so fully sets forth. In other words, he is for a while one of the *dramatis personæ*, and then becomes the dramatist, frankly putting on the stage the figments of the author's imagination. With such a method, compare that of one of the most effective stories man ever told — Defoe's "Robinson Crusoe." With the two novels first mentioned compare even "A Tale of Two Cities", which, once read, one wants to read over every

Digitized by Google

two or three years for the rest of his life. We have thus seen one way in which Force is related to Unity.

What I may call net effectiveness is greatly increased by avoidance of the faults that weaken discourse. The positive quality of inherent force, in sentences or in books, depends greatly on conviction and force of character; and these, in turn, upon the sum of hard work and strenuous living that is behind the utterance — upon the dynamics of a lifetime. Lincoln at Cooper Union made the platform historic from which he spoke, and made known to the Nation the literally uncouth Westerner who was destined to maintain its integrity. The great speech did its work because the speaker had thought so long and strenuously upon his subject, and meanwhile had toiled at the art of expression until from the pitiful crudities of his youth he had come near to that classic straightforwardness, simplicity, and force which later gave lonely distinction to his masterpieces. Uniform propriety in detail he never attained, and no wonder; but if our polished writers will turn out English like the letter to Greeley, the letter to Hooker, the Bixby letter, we may wink at the minor blemishes in which their work abounds.

Digitized by Google

Meanwhile if we cannot be great we can at least be careful, and give our work the force which comes from the absence of petty faults that are wholly needless.

Force is seen in widely differing compositions, great and little: in trifles like Charles Dudley Warner's record of the cat Calvin — "We never familiarly called him John"; in President Eliot's account of John Gilley; in Grant's Memoirs, so like the man; in Webster's massive speeches; in the close of Woodrow Wilson's inaugural; in the parables of the New Testament; in the twenty-third Psalm. Its ideal condition is perfect adaptation of the composition to the end in view. Adaptation of means to ends is within the power of every workman who has the spirit of Workmanship.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# INDEX OF PROPER NAMES


Abbott's Shakespearian Grammar, 123.
Adams, Brooks, 44.
Addams, Jane, 74, 75, 102, 113, 154, 195, 211, 293, 312.
Addison, Joseph, 62, 80.
Alden, Henry M., 3, 4, 50, 114, 173, 207, 234.
Aldrich, Thomas Bailey, 35, 76, 114, 116, 160, 181, 240, 249, 297, 301, 304.
Allen, James Lane, 62, 160, 172, 240, 269.
Arnold, Matthew, 29, 32, 60, 62, 73, 74, 79, 89, 91, 96, 101, 105, 111, 116, 177, 250, 258, 290, 292, 299, 312.
As You Like It, 128.
*Atlantic Monthly*, 46, 132.
Avebury, Lord (Sir John Lubbock), 73.

Bacon, Francis, 62.
Bagehot, Walter, 43, 50.
Barrie, James M., 119.
Bates, Katharine Lee, 46, 137.
Bennett, Arnold, 100.
Benson, Arthur Christopher, 29, 44, 52, 62, 84, 93, 105, 180, 190, 212, 263, 292.
Bible, 90, 91, 124, 151, 321.
Bigelow, Poultney, 43.
Biglow Papers, 277.
Birrell, Augustine, 56, 61, 106, 107, 133, 203, 293.
Black, William, 43, 61, 99, 292.
"B. L. T.", see Taylor.
Brooke, Stopford, 99, 137.
Brooks, John Graham, 32, 40, 81, 84, 86, 102, 103, 133, 147, 153, 183, 196, 220, 242, 249, 290, 293.
Browning, Robert, 121.
Bryant, William Cullen, 137.
Buffon, Georges L. L., 4.
Burroughs, John, 94, 196, 197, 289, 308, 310.

Calkins, Mary Whiton, 186.
Carlyle, Thomas, 53, 62, 86.
*Century Magazine*, 83.
Chaucer, Geoffrey, 55.
Chesterton, Gilbert K., 62, 107, 109, 112, 169, 184, 192, 196, 263, 306.
Churchill, Winston, 29, 30, 43, 85, 89, 111, 155, 190, 195, 213, 217, 301.
*Churchman*, 198.
Clemens, Samuel L., 18.
Clifford, William K., 171.
Coe, George A., 92, 111, 146, 153, 174, 196, 205, 292, 301, 304.




Digitized by Google

Comedy of Errors, 123.
Commons, John R., 213.
*Congregationalist*, 33.
Cooper, Frederic T., 10, 59, 83, 109, 137, 147, 184, 202, 203, 210, 211, 248, 306, 311.
Cooper, James Fenimore, 49, 275–277.
*Correct English*, 50.
*Cosmopolitan*, 116.
Craddock, Charles Egbert, see MURFREE.
Crawford, F. Marion, 34, 48, 62, 89, 91, 96, 116, 147, 160, 173, 252, 319.
Crothers, Samuel McChord, 40, 62, 84, 95.
Cymbeline, 128.

DANA, RICHARD H., 39, 43, 53, 70, 73, 86, 98, 180, 239.
Defoe, Daniel, 319.
Deland, Mrs. Margaret, 97, 302.
De Quincey, Thomas, 15, 62, 63, 86.
Dickens, Charles, 77, 317, 319.
Dole, Charles F., 62.
Drummond, Henry, 79, 192, 298, 312.

ELIOT, CHARLES W., ix, 146, 159, 177, 321.
Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 62.
Evans, William A., 83.
*Evening Post*, 137.

FERNALD, JAMES C., 113.
Fiske, John, 31, 62, 77, 97.
Flaubert, Gustave, 248, 253.
Foote, Mrs. Mary Hallock, 97, 99, 180.
Fuller, Henry B., 62, 93, 105, 121, 136.

GALSWORTHY, JOHN, 44, 61, 112.
Genung, John F., 75.
Gilder, Richard Watson, 37, 50, 61, 86, 209, 210, 267.
Gilman, Nicholas Payne, 189.
Gladstone, William E., 317.
Goldsmith, Oliver, 8, 55.
Grant, Ulysses S., 321.
Griffis, William Elliot, 77.

HADLEY, ARTHUR TWINING, 94, 155, 251, 289.
Hale, Edward Everett, 97.
Hall, Thomas C., 52, 213, 217, 267, 301.
Hamlet, 5, 81, 125, 151.
Hardy, Thomas, 3, 39, 76, 78, 80, 97, 146, 204, 224, 234, 258, 265, 293.
*Harper's Magazine*, 120, 172.
*Harper's Weekly*, 31, 157.
Harrison, Frederic, 224–227.
Hawkins, Anthony Hope, see HOPE.
Hewlett, Maurice H., 278.
Higginson, Thomas Wentworth, 41, 49, 81, 160, 291.
Hill, Adams Sherman, 17, 55, 92, 145, 231, 238, 240.
Hill, David Jayne, 38, 57, 193, 220.
Hoar, George F., 102.
Holmes, John Haynes, 19, 185, 217, 264, 306.
Holmes, Oliver Wendell, 137.
Hope, Anthony, 180, 223, 302.
Howells, William D., 54, 86, 89, 91, 100, 110, 112, 172, 179, 252, 296.
Hudson, Henry N., 128.

Digitized by Google

Ian Maclaren, see Watson.
*Independent*, 106, 114, 137, 170, 190, 195, 204.
International Dictionary, 55.

James, Henry, 274.
James, William, 29, 33, 59, 61, 97, 106, 132, 153, 171, 186, 211, 213, 221, 240, 259, 264.
Jevons, William S., 99, 118.
Jewett, Sarah Orne, 175, 178, 236, 244.
Johnson, Samuel, 295.
Julius Cæsar, 127.

Kingsley, Charles, 77.
Kirkup, Thomas, 103.

*Ladies' Home Journal*, 43.
Lamb, Charles, 62, 63.
Landor, Walter Savage, 122.
Lang, Andrew, 60, 113, 239, 253.
Lanier, Sidney, 254.
Lear, 128.
Leonard, Mary H., 201.
*Life*, 53, 76.
Lincoln, Abraham, 320.
Longfellow, Henry W., 10, 154.
Lounsbury, Thomas R., 12, 15, 23, 25, 26, 29, 58, 60, 70, 86, 97, 107, 108, 120, 121, 122, 157, 168, 175, 191, 197, 200, 218, 239, 249, 260, 306.
Lowell, James Russell, 19, 34, 36, 47, 58, 92, 96, 100, 159, 160, 172, 178, 185, 186, 203, 222, 223, 240, 252, 253, 256, 277, 302.
Lubbock, Sir John, see Avebury.

Mabie, Hamilton W., 116, 239, 264.
Macaulay, Thomas Babington, 62, 63, 87.
Maclaren, Ian, see Watson.
Macy, Jesse, 97.
Mahan, Alfred T., 38, 44, 107, 191.
Mark Twain, see Clemens.
Marsh, George P., 155.
Masefield, John, 40, 121, 168, 210.
Matthews, Brander, 58, 92, 118, 153, 169, 192, 199, 200, 212, 263, 291.
McCarthy, Justin, 62, 90, 93.
McMaster, John Bach, 112, 155, 180.
Merchant of Venice, 49.
Meredith, George, 41, 53, 82, 89, 98, 101, 102, 114, 131, 147, 211, 223, 224, 234, 240, 243.
Milton, John, 50, 55.
Mitchell, Donald G., 318.
More, Paul Elmer, 34, 47, 98.
Morse, John T., Jr., 48, 53, 81, 114, 116, 117, 118, 173, 177, 180, 264, 305.
Muir, John, 32, 35, 95, 148, 149, 156, 190, 252, 286.
Murfree, Mary N., 317.
Murray's New English Dictionary, 105.

Newman, John Henry, 3, 5, 11, 29, 51, 61, 72, 86, 90, 91, 93, 101, 105, 107, 131, 136, 152, 169, 184, 197, 250, 258, 266, 290, 297, 312.
*North American Review*, 206.
Norton, Charles Eliot, 50.

O'Connell, William H., 117.
Old Curiosity Shop, 319.
Othello, 127.

Digitized by Google

*Outlook*, 30, 33, 35, 91, 100, 102, 195, 306.

PARKER, SIR GILBERT, 34, 91, 134, 180, 220.
Parker, Theodore, 49.
Pater, Walter, 6, 27, 61, 148, 169, 208, 241, 244, 252, 293, 300, 306.
Perry, Bliss, 50, 62, 89, 97, 160, 252, 302.
Phillips, Wendell, 274.

QUILLER-COUCH, SIR ARTHUR T., 116.
Quintilian, 142.

RALEIGH, PROFESSOR WALTER, 62, 114, 137, 146.
Rauschenbusch, Walter, 58, 103, 106, 149, 156, 170, 251, 269, 288, 301, 304.
Repplier, Agnes, 73.
Rice, Mrs. Alice Hegan, 278.
Riggs, Mrs. George C., see WIGGIN.
Rolfe, William J., 127.
Roosevelt, Theodore, 30, 35, 37, 69, 115, 117, 120, 155, 174, 190, 236, 291, 302.
Root, Elihu, 113.
Royce, Josiah, 305.
Ruskin, John, 31, 61, 62, 70, 73, 86, 111, 167, 212.

SANTAYANA, GEORGE, 185.
*Scribner's Magazine*, 79, 97.
Scudder, Vida D., 44, 59, 146, 157, 173, 239.
Seeley, Sir John R., 265.
Shaftesbury, Lord, 243.
Shakspere, William, 49, 151, 208.
Shaler, Nathaniel S., 34, 76, 103, 114, 115, 239, 264.
Sheldon, Charles M., 266.
Slosson, Mrs. Annie Trumb 278.
Smith, F. Hopkinson, 34, 53, 1
Standard Dictionary, 76, 99, 115, 135, 158.
Stead, William T., 102, 211.
Stephen, Lealie, 99, 173, 264.
Stevenson, Robert Louis, 6, 5 185, 194, 240.
Stratton, George M., 120.
Sumner, Charles, 271.
Swift, Jonathan, 62.
Swinburne, Algernon Charle 62, 219, 270.

TAFT, WILLIAM HOWARD, 95.
Taylor, Bert Leston, 158, 185.
Thackeray, William Makepeace, 234.
Thoreau, Henry D., 86.
*Times*, London, 129.
*Tribune*, Chicago, 105, 129, 306.
*Tribune*, New-York, 112.
Trollope, Anthony, 249.
Twelfth Night, 127.

VAN DYKE, HENRY, 61, 84, 120, 154, 251, 264, 291.

WARD, MRS. ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS, 44, 99, 172, 242, 254, 264, 265.
Ward, Mrs. Humphry, 44, 61, 74, 89, 169, 179, 305.
Warner, Charles Dudley, 321.
Washington, Booker T., 190.
Watson, John, 95.
Webster, Daniel, 321.
Wells, Herbert G., 102, 148, 266.
Wharton, Mrs. Edith, 47, 62, 115, 117.

Digitized by Google

White, Arnold, 49.
Wiggin, Kate Douglas, 62, 305.
Wilson, Woodrow, 34, 37, 89, 111, 117, 170, 209, 287, 291, 311, 321.
Winter, William, 37.
Woodberry, George E., 46, 84, 102, 147, 171, 185, 195, 210, 218, 266.
Woodbridge, Elizabeth, 46.
Woods, Robert A., 84.
*World*, New-York, 45, 69, 179.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

# GENERAL INDEX


ABBREVIATED FORMS (colloquial), 274.
Abridged clause, 35; participle with sense of, 38.
Abridged expressions artificial, 37.
Abridgments, My, 35–42. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
Agreement. *See* CONCORD.
Ambiguity, 151, 156, 160.
Aorist (preterit) for pluperfect, 91.
Art — " mere artist ", 11.
*as* for *so*, 97, 250, 291.
*as if*, present with, 92.
Attraction, disagreement by, 30, 31.
Automatic Sentence, The, 174–181. *See* CLEARNESS.
Awkward Squad, The, 256–271. *See* EASE.

BAD PRACTICE, 288–294. *See* FORCE.
*because* and *quod*, 84.
"Book-talk", 308.
*both alike*, 114.
*both . . . and*, etc., 55–67. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY (correspondents).
*both* (of more than two), 55.
CADENCES, 271.
Causal clause substantive, 83.
"Chaos", 220.
Character and force, 320.
Clearness, 141–227. Introductory, 141–144: what it requires, 142, related to correctness, ease, and force, 144; punctuation and clearness, 145–150; formal clearness (I), 151–161; (II), *only*, 162–167; the squinting construction, 168–173; the automatic sentence, 174–181: negative subject, ill-matched predicates, 174, how avoided, 176; the crazy sentence, 182–188: identification of things not the same; more insanity, 189–198: confusion, 189, necessary words omitted, 190, needless words inserted, 192, "figure of speech", 193; *it*, 199–207: confusion as to antecedent; other pronouns, 208–214: personal, 208, relative, 212 (*such, so, other*, 212); unclassified confusions, 215–227: courtesy and justice to readers, 215 (*cf.* 246).
Clumsiness, Two Forms of, 236–240. *See* EASE.
Comma between adjective and substantive, 132, 242.




Digitized by Google

Comparison and Coördination, 49–54. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
Comparisons are Odorous, 43–48. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
Complementary infinitive, 89.
Compounds, 134.
Concerning Form, 8–13. *See* INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS.
Concord, 28–34. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
Conditional sentences, mixed forms, 92.
Confusions, Unclassified, 215–227. *See* CLEARNESS.
Coördination, Comparison and, 49–54. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
Correspondents, 55–67. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
Courtesy to readers, 215, 246.
Crazy Sentence, The, 182–188. *See* CLEARNESS.
"Cut it", 304.

DERIVATION, 261, 306.
Dialect spelling, 277.
*dilapidation*, 111.
Disagreement by attraction, 30, 31.
Dry as Dust, 23–27. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.

EASE, 231–279. Preliminary, 231–235: defined, 231, sources of, 231, what it requires and forbids, 233; two forms of clumsiness, 236–240: split infinitive, 236, "straddle", 238; punctuation and ease, 241–247: comma between adjective and substantive, 242 (*cf.* 132), "jerk, jolt, and clutter", 243, courtesy to readers, 246; euphony, 248–255: sibilation, 249, *so* and *as*, 250, harsh combinations, 252; the awkward squad (I), 256–262; (II), 263–271: repetitions, 263, nest-of-boxes, 268, pairs, 270; formality and good form, 272–279: editorial *we*, 273, abbreviated forms, 274, reporting conversation, 275, dialect spelling, 277.
Ease and prolixity, 81.
Emphatic modifier misused, 178.
Euphony, 248–255. *See* EASE.

"FIGURE OF SPEECH", 193.
*find*, with pure infinitive, 89, 90.
Finish, objections to, 64.
*first two, two first*, 108.
Force, 283–321. Good theory, 283–287: definition, 283, formulas, 284, the disagreeable, 285, examples of force, 286; bad practice, 288–294: *when* for *and then*, 289, repetition, 289, *that*, 292, *which*, 293, revision, 294; line upon line, precept upon precept, 295–303: "models", 295, realism, 297; here a little and there a little, 304–313: "cut it", 304, tautology, 305, "book-talk", 308, examples of force, 310, "wordy", 311; the larger unit, 314–321: the small book, 316, restraint in description etc., 317, illusion, 318, character and force, 320.

Digitized by Google

Force, formulas for, 81, 284.
Formal Clearness (I), 151–161. *See* CLEARNESS.
Formal Clearness (II), *Only*, 162–167. *See* CLEARNESS.
Form, Concerning, 8–13. *See* INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS.

Formality and Good Form, 272–279. *See* EASE.
Freedom of statement, limited, 19.

GERUND, CONSTRUCTION WITH, 85.
Good Form, Formality and, 272–279. *See* EASE.
Good manners of style, 215, 246.
Good Theory, 283–287. *See* FORCE.
Grammatical Propriety, 23–137. Dry as dust, 23–27: grammar and usage, 23, grammar, conventions of, 24, principles of, 25; concord, 28–34: *neither*, plural verb, 29, disagreement by attraction, 30, pronoun and antecedent, 32; my abridgments, 35–42: abridged clause, 35, participle with sense of abridged clause, 38; comparisons are odorous, 43–48; comparison and coördination, 49–54: illogical comparisons, 49, comparison and correspondence, 51, coördination and correspondence, 51, inelegant coördination, 53; correspondents, 55–67: without coördination, 56, how used by great essayists, 62, normal use, 63, objections, 64, conclusions, 66; the pronoun, 68–82: with negative antecedent, 69, relative, 74, "*whom* nominative", 76, "*who* objective", 77, *what*, 79, *that* restrictive, 80; some matters of syntax, 83–95: causal clause substantive, 83, gerund in *ing*, 85, complementary infinitive, 89, tenses (and modes), 90; misused particles, 96–103: *again, alone, and* ("try and"), 96, *as, between*, 97, *from, into*, 98, *like, most, neither, nor, or*, 99, *of, only, previously*, 100, *so, still, than*, 101, *that*, 102, *till, to, upon*, 103; misused words in general, 104–118: (104–113) *able, aggravate, another, apt*, 105, *attempt, both, comprise, either*, 106, *expect, expedition, fancy, feel*, 107, *first* ("two first"), 108, *got*, 109, *home*, 110, *latter, loan, look, mean, more* or less, *point*, 111, *regard, result, seem, substitute, the*, 112, *want, watch, way* (for *away*), *witness*, 113, (114–118) *a, affect, aggravate, avail, avocation, blame, both*, 114, *butcher, cheap, demean, either, feel*, 115, *first* ("two first"), *got, impossible, incapable, inveigle, miss, phenomena*, 116, *point, popular, possess, problem* (theorem?), *seem*, 117, *team, whole, wrestle*, 118; *shall* and *will*, 119–130: proper use, 119, in Shakspere's time, 122, *should* and *would*, 120, 121, 125, 127, 128; punctuation, 131–137: comma, 131, hyphen, 134, quotation-marks, 135.

Digitized by Google

HAD BETTER, 122.
"*he having*", 267.
Here a Little and There a Little, 304–313. *See* FORCE.
Hyphen-compounds, 134.

IDENTIFICATION, 182–188.
Illusion in fiction, 318.
Imperfect for pluperfect, 91.
Infinitive, split, 236.
Insanity, More, 189–198. *See* CLEARNESS.
Introductory (to clearness), 141–144. *See* CLEARNESS.
Introductory Chapters, 3–20. Preliminary, 3–7: "slipshod writing", 3, style, 4, words, importance of, 5; concerning form, 8–13: journalistic writing, 8, literature an art, 11, style, how regarded, 12; what the play treats on, 14–16; truth, 17–20.
It, 199–207. *See* CLEARNESS.
*it*, misused, 73.

LANGUAGE affected by "individual efforts", 129.
Larger Unit, The, 314–321. *See* FORCE.
*like* for *as*, 99, 170.
Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept, 295–303. *See* FORCE.
*listen to* with infinitive, 89.
Literature greatest of arts, 6.
*look* with predicate noun, 76.
*look at* with infinitive, 89.

MAKE WITH PARTICIPLE, 89.
*mark* with infinitive, 89.
Merchant of Venice, 49.
"Minor moralities", 4.
Misused Particles, 96–103. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
Misused Words in General, 104–118. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
"Models", 295.
More Insanity, 189–198. *See* CLEARNESS.
My Abridgments, 35–42. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.

NEGATIVE SUBJECT, ILL-MATCHED PREDICATES, 174.
*neither* with plural, 29.
Nest-of-boxes, 268.

ONLY, PLACE OF, 162–167.
*or* with plural, 30.
Other Pronouns, 208–214. *See* CLEARNESS.

PAIRS, 270.
Participle (predicate) unattached, 38.
Particles, Misused, 96–103. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
Pedantry, 15.
Preliminary (to Ease), 231–235. *See* EASE.
Preliminary (in general), 3–7. *See* INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS.
Private judgment, 12, 26.
Pronoun, The, 68–82. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
Pronoun and antecedent, 32.
Pronouns, Other (than *it*), 208–214. *See* CLEARNESS.
Pronoun, negative antecedent, 69.
Pronoun, relative, 74.
Proof-readers, 136.
Punctuation, 131–137. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
Punctuation and Clearness, 145–150. *See* CLEARNESS.

Digitized by Google

Punctuation and Ease, 241–247. *See* EASE.
Purist, the, 26.

QUOD AND BECAUSE, 84.

READERS, COURTESY TO, 215, 246.
Realism, 275, 297.
Relative, restrictive, 80.
Repetitions, awkward, 263, 289.
Reporting conversation, 275.
Restraint (brevity), 317.
Revision, 294.
Rhythm in prose, 167, 253, 290.

SHALL AND WILL, 119–130. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
*should* and *would*, 120, 121, 125, 127, 128.
Sibilation, 249.
Slipshod writing, 3.
Small book, the, 316.
*so* and *as*, 97, 250.
Some Matters of Syntax, 83–95. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
Spelling, dialect, 277.
Split infinitive, 236.
Spontaneity and revision, 65.
Squinting Construction, The, 168–173. *See* CLEARNESS.
"Straddle", 238.
Strength (force), formulas for, 81, 284.
Style, 4, 10, 12.
Style and substance, 8.
Superlative, in comparing two, 99.
Syntax, Some Matters of, 83–95. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.

TAUTOLOGY, 305.
Tediousness, 284.
Tenses, combination of, 90.
*than* misused, 101.
*that* overworked, 292; restrictive, 80.
"*they* singular", 72.
Truth, 17–20. *See* INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS.
*two first, first two*, 108.
Two Forms of Clumsiness, 236–240. *See* EASE.

UNSTUDIED TALK, 41, 259.
Usage, grammar and, 23; established, subject to criticism, 26.

VESTIGES, 306.

WAS FOR WERE, 91, 94.
*watch*, with infinitive, 89; with object clause, 113.
*we*, editorial, 273.
*were* for *had been*, 93; required, 94.
*what*, "conjunction" (*but what*), 79.
What the Play Treats On, 14–16. *See* INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS.
*when* for *and then*, 289.
*which*, double construction, 79, 80; not melodious, 81; overworked, 293.
"*who* objective", 77.
"*whom* nominative", 76.
Will, Shall and, 119–130. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
*witness*, with infinitive, 89.
Words, importance of, 5; natural objects, 7; thrown away, not wasted, 64, 259.
Words in General, Misused, 104–118. *See* GRAMMATICAL PROPRIETY.
"Wordy", 311.
*would better* (first person), 122.
*would, should* and, 120, 121, 125, 127, 128.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

2
E 5 5

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE
STAMPED BELOW

AN INITIAL FINE OF 25 CENTS
WILL BE ASSESSED FOR FAILURE TO RETURN
THIS BOOK ON THE DATE DUE. THE PENALTY
WILL INCREASE TO 50 CENTS ON THE FOURTH
DAY AND TO $1.00 ON THE SEVENTH DAY
OVERDUE.

SEP 5 1932

AUG 13 1940

MAY 1 1934

AUG 20 1934

JAN 14 1948

MAY 14 1935

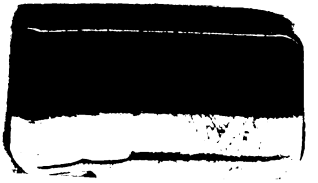
JUN 25 1

JUL 30 1940

Digitized by Google

gkt X
100 n

YB 02240



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google